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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

DECEMBER, 1964

Vol. 16, No. 1

NEW MIKE SHAYNE NOVELET

MURDER ON BERKELEY SQUARE

by BRETT HALLIDAY

The slain man's secret was buried in musty, World War II files, and all of the suspects had perfect alibis. Added to that . . . London wasn't exactly Shayne's home territory.

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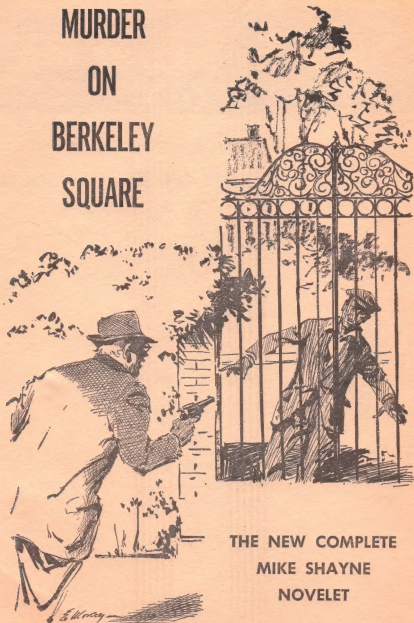
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MURDER ON BERKELEY SQUARE



THE NEW COMPLETE
MIKE SHAYNE
NOVELET

Shayne wasn't "summoned" to London by Scotland Yard exactly. But the murder had so many hard-to-explain angles that his arrival was greeted by some highly gratifying, very British cheers.



by Brett Halliday

MAJOR JAMES MacTavish Craig, Retired, D.S.O., O.B.E., sat alone at his desk in his dimly lighted study. The one-time intelligence officer attached to The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders, 1939-1943, worked in silence over papers on his desk. The dim room, lined with leather-bound books, filing cases, and the collected rifles, pistols, daggers and other sou-

venirs of a long military career, was on the ground floor of the big house on Berkeley Square.

It was an elegant house, built of white stone turned a pale cream-yellow with age, and it faced directly on the exclusive area of London that is Berkeley Square. There was a fine garden behind the house, and the study opened out onto the garden through french

doors. A thin and cold September rain was falling, and the french doors were closed as the Major worked over his papers. Major Craig could afford the fine house because he had become a very successful businessman since his retirement after World War II.

But it was not business that was occupying his attention now. Spread before Craig on the desk were five sheets of paper filled with what was obviously biographical data. To each sheet a photograph was attached, and the Major was reading the data with intense concentration. There was an expression of obvious excitement on his face. There was also an expression of a certain triumph.

From time to time he made a note on a pad as he studied the five photographs, and compared each in turn with a larger photograph of many men. He was so absorbed in his task that he did not hear the faint sound of the french doors opening. Neither did he see the figure in the raincoat who stepped into the room without making a sound and glided softly across the carpet toward the desk, leaving a gleaming trail of water on the rug.

Suddenly, the Major heard the intruder. He swung about, a look of stark fear coming into his eyes as he stared at the person standing before him, and at the long barrel of the pistol that was pointed directly at his chest. He was instantly

on his feet, his voice harsh with alarm.

"Who the devil are you, and what—"

Major Craig said no more. The long-barrelled gun moved in the intruder's clasp and fired once. The sound was like a combination of a whipping noise and a sharp snap. The long barrel of the gun was fitted with a silencer.

Major James Craig staggered, gasped once, and went over backwards. He lay on the floor of the study with his eyes wide and staring. Blood spread across the carpet. The room became completely silent. The figure in the raincoat looked down at the man he had slain.

Swiftly, he crossed to the desk and began to search rapidly through the data material the dead man had been studying. Apparently finding the paper he was seeking, the killer reached into a pocket of the raincoat and drew out another small piece of paper.

He manipulated the papers on the desk quickly, placing something from the desk back into the raincoat pocket. Satisfied, the killer now looked down at the body of Major Craig for the second time.

There was a sudden knock at the study door. The man in the raincoat froze for an instant. A voice spoke from the other side of the door.

"Major Craig? Did you call, sir?"

The killer moved. In three quick strides he was across the room and out through the french doors. The rain swallowed him as if it had simply vanished.

For a long minute the study of the big house on Berkeley Square was empty and silent. Only the body of Major Craig lay in the room. Then the door opened, and a stocky man stepped into the room.

This man was dressed in the formal clothes of a butler. He blinked for a moment when he found the room apparently empty. Then he noticed the overturned desk chair. He ran to the desk and stared down at the body of Major Craig.

Moving almost as rapidly as the departed killer, the butler bent down and listened to the chest of the dead man. Straightening, he reached for the telephone on the desk of the late Major James Craig. The butler asked for the police. He looked at his watch. It was 9 P.M.

II

MIKE SHAYNE stretched his long legs out under his desk and leaned back in his chair. The rays of the afternoon Miami sun filled his office and shone on the elongated figure of Tim Rourke. The cadaverous reporter was leaning forward in his chair as he spoke.

"It's just four o'clock now," Rourke said. "If we're on the next



scheduled New York flight we can get the morning jet out of New York for London with considerable time to spare."

"You say this Major Craig was a good friend?" Shayne said.

Rourke nodded. "We worked together during the war. I got to know Jim Craig pretty well. He was an intelligence officer attached to the Cameron Highlanders for a long time. After the war he went into his family business and prospered. He is very well off now, but he never lost his interest in the military, or in the Camerons in particular. He's secretary of the Cameron's Veterans Organization."

Shayne was holding a clipping and a letter. Now the redhead tugged on his left earlobe and studied the clipping. He ran his big hand through his shock of red hair.

"All right, Tim, but what is this all about exactly."

"As I told you, Mike, Jim Craig told me this story while I was working with him over there in nineteen forty-three," Rourke said. "It seems that on March twelfth, three years previously, one of Hitler's bigshots took a run out on The Fuhrer and flew to England. His name was Helmut Von Scarza. He wasn't as big as Rudolf Hess, but he was the next echelon. The British are still sure that Von Scarza's flight was tied in in some way with Hess's flight later, but they were never able to prove it."

"Why not?" Shayne asked.

"Because they didn't get Von Scarza alive, and they found no papers on him except his identification. There was some doubt about his really being Von Scarza at first, but a lot of British Intelligence men knew Von Scarza, and the identification of the body was positive."

"He was killed in the jump?"

The reporter shook his head. "No, he was shot. You see, he had the bad luck to jump right into the middle of a training area near Bury St. Edmunds. That's farming country in the East of England. The Cameron Highlanders had a training center there at the time. Von Scarza was spotted coming down. The military were notified, and an official party went out to pick him up.

"Well, to make it short, when the official party arrived at the spot they found Von Scarza dead

in a field. He had been shot down. Four Cameron Highlanders, and an ATS Sergeant were with the body. The ATS Sergeant was a driver, and she had driven the other four there. That was how they happened to get there first.

"They all told the same yarn. They had seen Von Scarza on his way down, the ATS girl had driven them to the spot to capture him. Von Scarza was on the ground when they got there. He started to run. They called to him to halt. He turned and fired at them. They all shot back and Von Scarza was killed. The official party found that Von Scarza had been shot twice in the chest, and he did have a machine pistol that had been fired. They held an inquiry, but it all seemed simple enough, so they rendered an official verdict acquitting the five.

"It wasn't until a few days later that Craig got into the act and started wondering. In the first place, no aircraft had crashed, so Von Scarza must have been flown to England by someone else. That made it look as if Von Scarza had been on a mission of some kind. Anyway, Craig found it hard to swallow Von Scarza as a simple deserter. And if Von Scarza had been a simple deserter, why keep his identification to show how important he was? If he *wanted* to be identified, why would he turn and shoot at the five people?

"The more Craig thought about

it the fishier it seemed. All five of those people told the same story, and yet it didn't make sense that Von Scarza would try to shoot it out. On the other hand, Craig couldn't understand why a man of Von Scarza's rank would risk a trip to England completely empty-handed. Why had Von Scarza come? He had no papers, no documents to trade, no messages even."

Shayne tugged slowly on his left earlobe, narrowed his grey eyes and peered out his office window into the bright afternoon sunlight. He began to nod as he summed up.

"Craig figured that either Von Scarza came to make a deal, in which case he would have had something to trade on him," Shayne said. "Or he came on a peace-proposing mission, and would have had some message. Or he came on a spy mission and would have had some money and no identification."

"Craig thought of a fourth possibility," Rourke said.

"That Von Scarza was really deserting," Shayne said, "in which case he would probably have been carrying all the valuables he could lay his hands on. He would have expected capture, but would have wanted time to bury his loot for later. That would explain why, when the five surprised him, he shot it out."

"Maybe," Rourke said, "but why have identification? If he was

deserting he would have had a phony set of papers, to prevent British from knowing who he was. Anyway, Craig didn't like the whole set-up. He came up with a theory. He's convinced that Von Scarza came for *two* reasons. He thinks that Hitler sent Von Scarza to make a deal with England, so the credentials were necessary.

"But he also thinks that Von Scarza was out for himself as well. He thinks that Von Scarza took on the mission for his boss, but his main purpose was to gather up a tidy sum of loot for himself to make life easier after the war, no matter who won."

Shayne nodded. "That would be logical. A mission for the Fuhrer, but money for Von Scarza in case Germany lost."

"Exactly," Rourke said. "Craig thinks that those five people would not have stolen plans or documents. He thinks they captured Von Scarza, found something more valuable and negotiable, and shot him down. It could have been money or anything valuable but not too heavy. Craig thinks they found it, hid it, and then cooked up their story.

"No one was suspicious, they had plenty of time to re-hide it carefully. Intelligence did try to get information from Germany about Von Scarza, but Hitler had declared him a traitor, and no one would talk about him. He looked like a simple deserter shot resist-

ing capture, and they closed the case. They all forgot it except Craig. He's kept tabs on all five of those people."

"And now?" Shayne said.

"Craig thinks the Von Scarza loot is about to turn up."

"How do you know that?"

"I got that letter and clipping in the mail this morning," Rourke said.

Shayne turned his attention to the letter and clipping again. The letter was short but to the point:

Dear Tim; This may be it! Come join the hunt. Bring that detective friend of yours, we may need him. This is our show. I want the police out of it. I've waited too long to be proven right. They've forgotten the case, so it is all ours. Tell your friend to be prepared for a spot of trouble, have had prowlers lately around the house. In anticipation, James Craig.

The clipping was only a tiny fragment. The message on the clipping was brief and cryptic.

*In Memoriam
March 12, 1940*

*Chlanna nan con thigibh a
so 's gheibh sibh feoil!!*

As Shayne read the clipping he raised one shaggy red eyebrow and looked at the elongated reporter.

"It's from the *London Times*," Rourke said. "It appeared a few days ago. On the anniversaries of

big battles like The Somme in nineteen sixteen the whole front page of *The Times* is full of *In Memoriam* notices like that."

"So why does Craig think it means something about Von Scarza?" Shayne asked.

"Three reasons, Mike," Rourke said. "There wasn't any battle on the twelfth day of March, nineteen forty. That was the 'Phony War' period. Those notices always appear on the day they are commemorating. But this one says March and it appeared in September."

"So it could be a message," Shayne agreed. "What's the third reason?"

"The line under the date."

"It's Gaelic, right? What does it mean?"

"It means, 'Sons of the hounds come here and get flesh,' Mike. It's the war cry of the Clan Cameron!"

"That's quite a war cry," Shayne said.

"It's also an invitation, Mike," Rourke said. "It all fits. The date, the way it's not like the other notices, and the war cry of The Camerons."

"And you want to go over?"

"Both of us, Mike. Craig says he's had prowlers around his house."

"Okay, Tim, if you need my help."

"I'll call Craig right now and tell him we're coming!"

The lean reporter had Lucy

Hamilton put the call through to London. While Rourke waited to be connected, Shayne told his pert secretary to get two seats on the next jet to New York.

"Then get two on some morning jet to London, angel," Shayne said. "Tell everyone I've gone fishing."

"Why waste an opportunity like that, Michael?" Lucy Hamilton said. "I'll tell them you've gone on a big case for Scotland Yard."

"That kind of lie wouldn't be believed unless you put real conviction into your voice, angel. Somehow it hardly seems worth the effort. You may get twenty or more phone calls tomorrow."

Behind Shayne Tim Rourke suddenly swore. Shayne whirled to see the reporter just putting down the receiver. Rourke looked stunned.

"Maybe not a lie, Mike," Rourke said. "Jim Craig's been killed. Not a half an hour ago. The police were there."

III

SOMEHOW ALL THE way to New York and across the Atlantic, there was no doubt at all in Shayne's mind that Major James Craig had died because of his interest in the long-dead Helmut Von Scarza. As Ireland slid far below beneath the wing of the jet, Shayne was sure of that.

By the time the lights of London



Airport loomed ahead through the rain, Shayne had the five names told to him by Tim Rourke engraved in his brain: Pvt. Alistair MacKenzie; Sergeant Malcolm Douglas; Pvt. George Bannerman; Pvt. Paul MacLeod and ATS Sergeant Naomi Partridge.

"MacKenzie and MacLeod were recruits, both Scots, of course," Rourke had explained. "Douglas was a training Sergeant, a veteran soldier. Bannerman was a recruit, too, but he was an American volunteer. The Partridge woman was an experienced ATS driver. Craig once wote to me that they've all done well since the war, but nothing spectacular."

"One of them seems to have decided to be spectacular," Shayne said. "Unless they're *all* in on the murder of Craig."

"You think that they found out that Craig was on to them?" Rourke asked.

"Until someone shows me a bet-

ter motive, Tim," Shayne said.

Then it was time to fasten seat belts, and the giant jet started its long run into the rain of London Airport. Once on the ground, the trip into the city itself seemed to take as long as the flight across the Atlantic.

In their taxi, Rourke fumed impatiently in the thick London traffic. If anything, Rourke stormed, London had worse traffic than New York on a Friday night rush hour.

"He'll wait, Tim," Shayne said.

"I liked him, Mike," Rourke said. "He went through six years of war without a scratch."

"It looks like the war caught up with him, Tim," Shayne said.

Shayne and Rourke had sent their bags directly to the Melton Hotel on Russel Square, the hotel Shayne always used when he came to London, and the taxi drove them directly to the house of Major James Craig on Berkeley Square. There were black police cars still around the house. As Shayne strode through the uniformed police guard on the door, the first person he saw was his old friend Inspector Roderick McBain of Scotland Yard.

"Well, well, Mike Shayne," the CID man beamed. "How do you fit into all this?"

"Sort of a friend of a friend of the family," Shayne said, and the redhead introduced Tim Rourke to Inspector McBain. The Inspec-

tor frowned when he heard who Rourke was.

"A reporter? We don't usually like reporters at a murder scene in this country, Mr. Rourke. We—"

"I'm not representing my paper, Inspector," Rourke said. "I'm strictly here on my own. Jim Craig and I worked together during the war. We kept in touch."

Shayne carefully studied the elegant London house. They were all standing in a wide entrance hall. A slightly-curving stairway led up to the second and third floors. The entrance hall itself narrowed as it led back past the staircase. It ended at a door in the rear of the house. This door was open and revealed a pantry-kitchen at the rear. Two other doors opened off the narrow part of the hall. The door nearest the street was also open and showed a well-appointed living room. The second door, nearer the rear of the house, was closed.

Shayne nodded at the second door. "Is that the murder room, McBain?" he said.

"Yes," McBain said. "Craig's study."

"Maybe you could fill us in on what happened?" Shayne said.

"All right, come along," McBain said, and the Inspector led Shayne and Rourke down the hall and into the study. "Nothing has been touched except the body. You can see where we found it after the butler called us."

McBain indicated the chalked outline of a body that had been on the carpet just behind the desk. The stain of blood was dark and wide on the rug. Shayne's practiced eyes noted the papers on the desk, the open french doors, the faint mud stains that made a trail from the desk to the french doors. He saw the overturned desk chair and the position of the body as shown by the chalk outline on the carpet.

"The killer came in through the french doors," Shayne said. "Craig was working, probably didn't hear the killer at first. When he did he jumped up, half turned, and went over backwards when he was hit. He knocked over the chair."

"That's how we see it," McBain said. "The killer stood near the desk for a minute or more, right over the body. There was a fairly large puddle of water to prove that. Then the killer left the same way, through the french doors. He crossed the garden, went through the small gate to the street, and vanished. That's about all we're reasonably sure of."

"How many shots?" Shayne said.

"One, Mike, dead center," McBain said. "And silenced, of course."

"All very quick, neat and efficient. A good shot, and a fast worker."

"I doubt if he was in the room more than three minutes at the

most," McBain said. "Probably less."

"No one heard anything? That chair must have hit against the desk," Shayne said.

"Craig lived alone except for a cook and his butler," McBain informed him.

"Jim never did marry," Tim Rourke said. "He always said you could take a man out of the Army, but never the Army out of a man. Is his butler still the same man, Inspector? Ewen MacErlean?"

"The same. I understand he was Craig's batman in the Army."

"He was, and a first-rate soldier," Rourke said. "Ewen didn't hear anything?"

"Oh yes, he heard something," McBain said. "He heard the Major speak, and the sound of the chair banging against the desk. He thought nothing of it at first. It was only when he heard nothing more for a time that he came to knock on the door. MacErlean discovered the body and called us. The cook heard nothing at all."

Shayne had been listening carefully, but his steely grey eyes had been slowly scanning the room. He noted the open filing case and the papers on the desk. When he crossed the room to the desk and looked at the papers, his eyes suddenly gleamed and he whirled to face Inspector McBain.

Shayne held a sheet of paper in his big hand and waved it toward Tim Rourke. "Here it is, Tim!" he

snapped. "A biography of George Bannerman. Five biographies on his desk—the whole five of them! He was working on them when he was killed!"

Rourke hurried to the desk, and bent to study the papers which Shayne had just looked at. When he straightened up he was excited.

"That's it, Inspector," Rourke said. "One of these five, or maybe all of them, did this." The reporter went on to explain the story of Helmut Von Scarza to McBain. He showed McBain the note and clipping he had received from Craig.

The Inspector studied them, and nodded. "It certainly looks like the Von Scarza matter is coming to life again," he said. "But I'm afraid it doesn't help."

"Doesn't help?" Rourke said, his mouth open.

Shayne narrowed his grey eyes. "You mean you know about the Von Scarza affair, and the five people?"

McBain shrugged. "Give us a little credit, Shayne. The Von Scarza mess was a long time ago, but when I found these five biographies I checked with Military Intelligence. All five were military personnel, and Craig was a professional soldier. It was a logical thing to check. They told me about Von Scarza, but I don't think they were aware of this clipping from *The Times*. I must alert them immediately."

"You checked them?" Shayne said. "And it doesn't help?"

"I'm afraid not, Shayne," McBain said. "You see, we checked them thoroughly. Every one of them can account for every minute of their time last night. They all have perfect alibies!"

IV

IN THE DEATH room the only sound was the steady and insistent sound of thin rain falling outside in the garden. Tim Rourke sat down in one of the dead Major's leather chairs. McBain filled his pipe and carefully lighted it.

Shayne had begun to pace the carpet like a caged bear. "All of them?" the Miami detective said. "Perfect alibies?"

"Every one," Inspector McBain said.

"How perfect?" Shayne asked.

McBain took a small black notebook from the inside pocket of his suit coat. The Inspector studied his notes for a moment. Then he looked at Shayne.

"Skipping the details, which you can have later if you like," Inspector McBain said, "it reads like this: Alistair MacKenzie, age forty-four, ex-private in the Cameron Highlanders, was in Edinburgh, Scotland, at the time. That is some four hundred miles from London, and MacKenzie was seen by at least ten people who have known him all their lives. He

was attending a Church meeting for lay deacons!"

"They're sure?" Rourke said.

"Without a hope of doubt," McBain said, and looked again at his book. "Malcolm Douglas, aged fifty-two ex-sergeant of The Camerons, lives here in London. Unfortunately for us, at nine-o'clock last night Douglas was on prominent view at a party in Amsterdam, Holland. Nothing unusual; he makes the trip often. He owns a chain of garages here, and buys parts over there. He's very well known; the party happened to be given by the British Consul who knows Douglas personally! He flew back early this morning. He has his own plane. We met him."

Shayne was looking very black by now. He nodded his head to indicate that McBain could move on to his next perfect alibi.

"George Bannerman," McBain read. "Age forty-five, ex-corporal of The Camerons, was, of course, in America. He lives in some town near New York City called Tarrytown."

"I know it," Shayne said. "A fairly rich suburb of New York. It's just north, on the Hudson River."

"Well, at nine o'clock last night Bannerman was having dinner with his wife at a Country Club. He is a long time member. Some twenty other members talked with him. He was still there at mid-



night, fairly drunk. It seems he was having a small farewell party before leaving for London."

"He's in London now?" Rourke asked.

McBain nodded. "He is. He arrived on a jet before you two. We've talked to him. He's here on business. He happens to import whisky into your country from here. The police in Tarrytown tell us there is no shadow of a doubt that Bannerman was in Tarrytown last night, and that it was Bannerman himself."

"All right," Shayne said. "What about MacLeod?"

McBain continued to read from his notes. "Paul MacLeod, age

forty-five, ex-sergeant of The Camerons. MacLeod did well in the war. After the war he moved to Canada. He lives in Calgary where he owns a feed business. He has only one witness, but it's a good one. MacLeod, at nine o'clock last night, was on a trans-continental jet somewhere over Toronto. He was on the first leg of a trip to London."

"MacLeod's here, too?" Rourke said.

"What one witness?" Shayne said.

"The Calgary District Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police," McBain said. "It happens that the District Commissioner knows MacLeod well, and was sitting with him all the way to Toronto."

Shayne barely paused in his pacing. Rourke was looking stunned. McBain watched them both for a long minute before he read his last entry.

"Naomi Partridge," McBain read slowly. "Age forty-seven, ex-Sergeant of ATS. Lives now in Australia. At nine o'clock last night, and for many days before that, Miss Partridge was at sea! She docked at Southampton this morning, and went straight to visit her mother who lives here in London. We questioned her at her mother's home. The officers of the ship she sailed on from Sydney are quite sure she never managed to leave the ship en route."

Now the silence in the death room was like a tomb. The only sound was the noise of Shayne's feet against the carpet as he paced, the thin rain outside, and the distant traffic of London. McBain puffed on his pipe. Rourke sat without moving. Shayne stopped pacing.

"None of them could have done it," Shayne said, "but what other motive is there? Nothing was stolen?"

"Nothing, as far as the butler, MacErlean can tell," McBain said.

"No scandals, no love affairs?" Shayne said.

"Not Jim Craig," Rourke said from his chair.

"We're looking into it. Some business matter we thought," McBain said, "but so far Craig's business is smooth and totally uncomplicated. He owned a small textile factory, and rarely went near it. It brought him a good income and no more."

"What about the butler?" Shayne said. "Could his whole story be a lie? Maybe he stole something."

"I'll get him in here," McBain said. "As for stealing, we're having Craig's solicitor check the entire contents of the house."

McBain went to the study door and said something low to the constable on duty. A few minutes later a middle-aged man in butler's livery came into the room. The man's face was set and impassive,

but there were dark circles of grief around his eyes. MacErlean had a strong build and the rigid bearing of an old soldier.

"You wanted me, sir?" MacErlean said.

"Yes, Ewen," Inspector McBain said. "Tell these gentlemen just what you told me, about how you found the body."

"Yes, sir," MacErlean said. "I was helping Cook in the kitchen. She's been in hospital, you know. Well, I stepped out into the pantry and I heard the Major's voice. It's a fair distance to the study, you know, and both doors were closed. But I thought I heard him say 'What the devil do you want,' or 'Who the devil do you think you are,' or something like that.

"Then I heard the chair hit the desk as if the Major had stood up. Well, I wondered about the Major having a visitor. He hadn't mentioned anyone, and—"

"Don't you let visitors into the house?" Shayne said.

"Generally, sir," MacErlean said evenly, "but the Major often let personal friends in himself. If he knew they were coming he would watch for them from the living room."

"Go on, Ewen," McBain said.

"Well, I listened for a time from the pantry. While the Major did often have callers he let into the house himself, I was a little surprised because I knew he was working. Perhaps I should have

gone right into the study, but the Major was a man who could take care of himself, and I wasn't alarmed at first."

"What finally alarmed you?" Shayne said.

"The silence, sir," the butler said.

"The silence?" Shayne asked.

"Yes sir," MacErlean said.

"After the one time I heard the Major speak, and after I heard the chair strike the desk, there was no other sound. That was odd, you know? If anyone had come to see the Major, and was in the study, I should have heard something—voices, movement, an argument, something, you see? But there wasn't a sound. It made me wonder. The Major had taken his gun after a prowler only a few days ago.

"So I went to the study door, after I waited a few minutes, and I listened outside. At first I heard nothing at all. Then I'm sure I heard something like paper rustling. I still heard no voices, but the visitor could have left. There is a gate out of the garden. Remembering that, I knocked and called to the Major. When there was no answer, I went in."

"And found the Major dead?" Shayne said.

"Yes sir," Ewen MacErlean said.

"You saw no sign of the killer?"

"The french doors were open," the butler said, "but I saw and

heard nothing. I was concerned for the Major. Perhaps if I had come in earlier I—"

"I don't think so, Ewen," Inspector McBain cut in. "I'm afraid the Major was dead when you heard the chair strike the desk."

Shayne was tugging on his earlobe. The redhead seemed puzzled by something. He watched the impassive butler. The story sounded straight and honest, and from what Tim Rourke said the ex-soldier had been with Craig a long time.

There seemed to be a complete absence of motive. So it added up to the only person in the case with the opportunity, had no motive. And the five with motive, had no opportunity. Yet Shayne was puzzled by something he had heard.

"MacErlean, you say you think you heard *papers* being rustled?" Shayne said.

"Yes sir," the butler said.

"And nothing was missing?"

"Not that I know of, sir. The Major's solicitor is going to make a complete inventory, I believe."

"Do you think that will turn up anything missing, Ewen?" Inspector McBain said.

"No sir, I don't," MacErlean said. "I'm familiar with all that is in this room, sir, and I'll take my oath that nothing is missing."

"All right, Ewen, that's all for now," McBain said.

"Very good, sir," the butler said.

After MacErlean had gone, Shayne began to pace the study

again. He was frowning heavily. His expression was that of a man trying to piece together parts of a puzzle that did not fit. At last the redhead turned to face Inspector McBain and Tim Rourke.

"This murder has to be connected to the Von Scarza affair, Inspector. Somewhere we're missing the key," Shayne said slowly. "The killer was quick and deadly. He was in and out in minutes. There was no struggle, no robbery, no papers taken. The man came to kill Craig. I'm sure of that. And yet he stayed in the room a few extra minutes and shuffled some papers. Why?"

"From MacErlean's story, and the position of the body and chair, it's obvious that the killer entered, Craig heard him, turned, said a few words, and was killed immediately. No wait, no hesitation. Then the killer shuffled papers *after* Craig was dead. Yet nothing is missing, and the only papers in sight are the five biographies on the desk. I'd say those five people are still suspects."

"I'm afraid I can't go along with that," McBain said. "They were all cleared of any wrong in the Von Scarza matter. That case was closed years ago. In fact, there was no case. Your Major Craig was on a wild goose chase."

"Do you really believe that?" Shayne said.

"Officially, yes," McBain said, "I can't annoy innocent people. Es-

pecially people with absolute alibies."

"Four of them in London? Some coincidence," Shayne said.

"Five in London," McBain corrected. "MacKenzie drove to London immediately after his Church meeting last night. You see Shayne, they all have a perfectly good reason to be here—tonight is the twenty-fifth Reunion of The Queens Own Cameron Highlanders being mustered for the war in nineteen thirty nine."

"And a hell of a good cover for five people to come together to split up the Von Scarza loot," Shayne said. "I wondered why they picked this exact time, now I know. That's why they chose September instead of March."

"They all have alibies, Shayne," McBain said.

"Then they won't mind talking to me," Shayne said.

"Don't push too hard, Shayne, we have laws here," McBain said.

"You have killers, too," Shayne said grimly.

V

MIKE SHAYNE entered the modest hotel where Alistair MacKenzie was staying. MacKenzie was his first stop. One of five people with perfect alibies had killed Major James Craig. He was sure of that, and now he had to find out why and how. He had to find something to break a perfect alibi.



In his mind he went over what he knew about Alistair MacKenzie. He had already checked and found that MacKenzie owned his own house, had bought it only a year after the war. The Scot was a respected carpenter, and a deacon of his local Church. The room door opened before he could knock, and a tall, raw-boned man stood in the doorway, glaring at Shayne.

"Alistair MacKenzie?" Shayne said.

"Aye, and you'll be the one asking the questions about me? We're a small hotel here; they told me you were asking," MacKenzie said. "You're a bold snooper, I'll gie ye that. What business is it of yours if I own my wee cottage and do my work?"

"Not if, MacKenzie, *when* you owned your cottage," Shayne said. "Your parents left you some money, perhaps?"

"No, my uncle, rest his soul," the big Scot said.

The tall man stepped back and

waved Shayne into the room. Shayne digested the information that MacKenzie claimed to have bought his house with money left by his uncle, while he was following MacKenzie into the room. He already knew that MacKenzie was a bachelor. Now the tall Scot motioned Shayne to a chair and lighted a black pipe.

MacKenzie gave Shayne a canny look. "It'll be the Von Scarza thing, o' course," he said. "They won't let it be, now will they? Twenty-five years and they still don't believe we found nothing that night."

"Didn't you," Shayne said.

"No, we did not! You can check all you like. My uncle died, I came into a bit of money, I bought a wee cottage. I do my work, I do the Lord's work, and I mind my business."

"Does your business include waiting to split a fortune? Or the murder of Major James Craig?"

The tall Scot almost jumped. His teeth clamped hard on his pipe as he stared at Shayne. Unless he was a very good actor, MacKenzie's anger seemed genuine enough.

"I never killed the Major!" MacKenzie said. "And if ye think that I—"

"He was killed because he knew that after twenty-five years the Von Scarza loot was about to be split up!"

"Ye think I would kill the

Major? Man, you must be daft!"

"You knew the Major well?"

"O' course I knew the Major well! He kept in close touch wi' all old Camerons, ye must know that? Rest his soul, the puir man. Sunday we'll pray for him at meeting."

"You do that," Shayne said. "Tell me, MacKenzie, what do plan to do with your share of the loot? Start a missionary service?"

"Ye dinna believe, an' I dinna care a damn! You'll leave now."

Shayne nodded. There was little else to be learned from MacKenzie. The man seemed to be just what he said he was. Shayne stood up to leave. But as he passed from the room to the hall he glanced to his right. On the floor near the bed there were two packed suitcases still open as if waiting for last-minute items to be packed. MacKenzie was ready to leave in a hurry.

In the street Shayne thought about the suitcases. The question was—did MacKenzie plan a trip back home, or somewhere else? A great many people swore MacKenzie had been at his Church at the exact murder time. How could a man be in two places at the same time? A question that applied equally to the next name on Shayne's list—Malcolm Douglas.

VI

LONDON WAS grim with a dark rain. A thin mist seemed to hang

over all the street lights as Mike Shayne's taxi crossed Piccadilly toward the home of Malcolm Douglas, one-time Sergeant of The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders.

Shayne dismissed his taxi at the door of Douglas's house. It was a tall, stone town house with brass knockers and knobs on the door that gleamed like gold even in the rain and mist. A servant let Shayne in.

The interior of the house was elegant. The servant ushered Shayne into a small, book-lined study to wait for Douglas. The ex-Sergeant did not keep Shayne waiting. A burly, stocky man, Douglas was dressed in evening clothes that did not suit him. His thick hands showed the scars and calluses of hard work. Douglas studied Shayne without shaking hands.

"American, eh? Well, I suppose this is about old Craig's sudden end, eh?" Douglas said, and Shayne noted that the Scot had lost all but a trace of his accent, if he had ever had an accent. "Yes, I know about it. The police told me when they checked my alibi. A beauty, eh, my alibi? Everyone saw me in Amsterdam. The consul is a fine witness."

"That was convenient," Shayne agreed.

"Very," Douglas said drily. "A drink? Cold night for this sort of work, eh? Whisky? You fellows

call it Scotch, don't you? As a matter of fact I think I even have some of your Rye whisky in the house. Canadian Club, if that's any good."

"It's very good," Shayne said, "but I drink brandy myself."

"Brandy it is then," Douglas said.

The stocky man went to a small home bar and poured the drinks himself. He handed a glass to Shayne. Douglas was very generous with his cognac. Shayne noted the expensive bottle of the best Remy Martin. Douglas sipped his own brandy and peered at Shayne.

"I don't have to talk to you, eh? I don't even know who you are or why you're involved. My solicitors would tell me to throw you out. We're very wary of private police work here. Just what is your name?"

"Shayne," Shayne said. "Michael Shayne from Miami, and I'm a friend of the late Major Craig."

"Are you now? He never mentioned that. I heard him talk about a chap named Rourke from Miami, but no Shayne. Still, I don't mind talking to you. I'm an open book."

"An expensive one from the look of this place," Shayne said.

"I've done well," Douglas said, "and if you're thinking about the mythical Von Scarza treasure, don't. I ran a garage after the war. I had a partner. He sold out for a share of future profits, so it became

all mine and now I have thirty garages. You can't check my story, my partner's dead, eh?"

"Convenient again," Shayne said.

"I have guests, Mr. Shayne, if there's nothing more?"

"Just one thing," Shayne said. "Are you planning a trip, by any chance?"

"A trip No," Douglas said. "Except my usual visits to Amsterdam on business. I go quite often, if it's any of your business."

"Murder is always my business, Douglas."

"But I have such a good alibi, Mr. Shayne," the stocky man said with a smile.

Douglas rang for the servant. Dismissed, Mike Shayne had no choice but to leave. Douglas was right, the English were very hard on private police work. But before he left, Shayne had one more question.

"I don't suppose you five ever lost sight of each other," Shayne said. "That would be risky."

"You mean the notorious Von Scarza five?" Douglas said. "I don't think we ever saw each other again. That kind of thing you don't like to perpetuate—false accusation and all." The stocky man grinned. "For all I know, they could all be dead and buried."

In the street, Shayne pulled the collar of his coat up against the thin rain. He decided to walk to

think. Two men so far, both with fine alibies, but both who had had sudden money just after the war. Not a lot of money, but some, as if they had taken a small piece of the loot for immediate use. That would be what poor men would do, and all five had been poor. He was more and more certain that Helmut Von Scarza had indeed been carrying something very valuable that night, and that the five had stolen it. But that did not prove they had killed Craig.

He was still thinking about the Von Scarza loot when he saw the shadow under the street light. It was a quick shadow. It came out of an alley into the light behind Shayne. He barely saw it. He heard a faint noise, like a sharp crack of a small whip.

Shayne never did see where the bullet struck. At the first faint sound of the silenced pistol, he dove for the cover of a nearby doorway. The second bullet tore his coat sleeve. He felt a thin trickle of warmth on his arm. Then his own pistol was out and firing at the shadow.

The shadow vanished back into its alley.

Shayne left the doorway and dashed after the unknown assailant. By the time he reached the alley he heard a car motor start, and saw the red taillights of a fast-moving car vanish out of the far side of the alley. Windows were opening now, and people were

beginning to shout. Not far off he heard the musical sound of an English police constable's whistle calling for aid.

Shayne had no desire to be questioned. He started walking rapidly in the same direction as the car.

An attempt had been made on his life. Which meant that someone in the case with something to hide knew that Mike Shayne was coming dangerously close to finding out exactly what that something was. He had seen only two of the five, but there was no reason to rule out any of the other three who could have been following him.

But the shooting made Shayne feel better. The assailant had shot at *Shayne*—and Shayne was the one checking out the five perfect alibies. Perhaps someone's alibi was not quite perfect after all.

VII

MIKE SHAYNE found George Bannerman in his London Hotel. The American ex-corporal of the Cameron Highlanders was a well-built man of average height. He wore his brown hair cropped short, and was glad to see a fellow American. Bannerman was eating breakfast in his room when Shayne came in.

"Shayne, right?" Bannerman said. "Nice to see a face from home. Not that I've been here



that long, but I miss the place when I'm gone ten minutes."

"I thought you'd be at home over here," Shayne said.

"You mean because of the war? Kid stuff, Shayne. Sure, I wanted to get in it then. The Camerons were a good outfit. But, you know, I didn't come back here for six years after the war, and since then I've only come on business. I buy the booze, and I blow home. Of course, the reunion is a bonus this time. First I've been to.

"You didn't keep in touch with the other four?" Shayne said.

Bannerman stopped eating, his left hand poised in mid-air and holding the fork like a conductor's baton. His manner was suddenly not as friendly.

"Von Scarza? You know, Shayne, I should have guessed. After the cops had me down at the Yard before I even got unpacked in here. I barely made it from the airport before I was picked up, and all because of that old Von Scarza business. I wish

we'd never seen the damned Kraut!"

Shayne watched the Scotch whisky importer carefully. The man was gesturing angrily with his fork, his right hand pounding the table with the handle of his knife. Bannerman appeared to have completely forgotten his breakfast.

"We shoot one Kraut and all hell breaks loose. You know, I was so shook up by that inquiry that I put a month in hospital? And Craig has to keep in touch all these years. I knew why, of course. He was watching us, keeping tabs, checking."

"You didn't like that?"

"Would you have liked it?"

"Not if I was waiting twenty-five years to collect my share of a lot of loot," Shayne said.

"Look, Shayne, I'm a whisky importer, I—"

"You got started just after the war, didn't you?" Shayne said.

"What? Yes, I started just after—"

"How? You don't come from a rich family."

"I borrowed from friends. You can check that if you don't believe me. While I was over here I made some contacts, and whisky looked like a good business. I import the best whisky, and that's all I do."

"And you never saw your old friends since the war?" Shayne said.

"Not once, Shayne! Now beat it, I've got work to do."

Another in the same pattern! Money from somewhere just after the war, and the beneficiary claiming with anger in his voice never to have been in touch with the other four. A pattern was emerging slowly, but clearly. Five people shoot a German. They each have money after the war. They do not even contact each other for twenty-five years.

Shayne, on his way down in the hotel elevator, began to wonder how closely MacLeod would fit the pattern. Paul MacLeod fitted it exactly.

The former Scot turned Canadian was a thin, peppery man with an irascible temper. At first he had refused to see Shayne when the redhead had called up to his room in a far less expensive hotel than that favored by George Bannerman. But at the mention of Shayne's full name, MacLeod relented. It seems he had heard of Mike Shayne.

"Sure, I've read all about you," MacLeod said, "but I can't imagine what you want with me. I've told the police all I know about Major Craig, which adds up to precisely nothing, except that the man was too nosy for his own good!"

"Just tell me when and how you started your business, and how often you've seen or contacted the other four," Shayne said.

"I started it right after the war. The 'how' is none of your damned concern! And I want no part of, as you put it, 'the other four.' I don't know why we have to be lumped together like a pack of hounds."

"I suppose I'll find out that you inherited a little money from a distant cousin, or borrowed money from a man now conveniently dead. Or perhaps you won a small fortune in a crap game after the war?"

"Poker," the peppery man said.

"Okay," Shayne said. "Tell me why you claim to be in London?"

"The reunion," the thin little man snapped.

"The reunion is in London," Shayne said, and he pointed a bony finger at MacLeod's neatly packed suitcase. It was as if the small Canadian had never unpacked.

"Is it illegal to take a trip to Brighton now?" MacLeod asked.

"Not illegal, MacLeod. But I'm beginning to wonder if it isn't dangerous."

"In what way, Shayne?" the peppery man demanded.

"I'm not sure exactly, but I'm getting a strange feeling about you five. I'll just say that if it's Brighton I'm sure it's legal *and* safe. But I'm not sure about anywhere else."

A strange idea was taking shape in Shayne's mind. An idea that could explain five perfect

alibies—and yet leave one clever killer among the five. He had one more stop to make to be sure. The home of Naomi Partridge's mother.

The house turned out to be a small, old building on Shawfield Street in Chelsea. Outside, the building was dark and grim. A small but long crack ran almost the whole length of the front facade—a legacy of wartime bombing. Inside, the house was neat and comfortable. A warm coal fire was burning on the grate in the front room.

Naomi Partridge was an extremely attractive woman, despite the fact that she was crowding fifty. She was tall and slender, with red-gold hair. Her mother was small and old, and sat in an overstuffed armchair with a fixed smile on her face. Naomi was no happier to see Shayne than any of the other four.

"I emigrated right after the war, Mr. Shayne," Naomi said. "I was not aware that there was anything wrong with that."

"Passage money and getting started in a new country," Shayne said. "I imagine you didn't go out there penniless."

"I have a beauty shop in Sydney, and as for passage, I had friends—male friends," Naomi said. "Any more questions?"

"You knew Major Craig, and he knew you?" Shayne asked.

"I've already told the police.

Yes, the Major kept in touch. I'm sort of an honorary Cameron Highlander; I drove for the Colonel. That's why I decided to come to the Reunion. It will be nice to see them all again."

"You never saw them after the war?"

She shook her head. "How could I? I was in Australia."

"Of course," Shayne said. "But Craig kept in touch with all of you didn't he? Bannerman in America, MacLeod in Canada; Douglas in London, MacKenzie in Scotland, and you in Australia."

"He did indeed," Naomi Partridge said. "New addresses, changes in our lives, snapshots, what we did, everything for his files."

Shayne sat on the edge of the ancient stuffed sofa and began to tug slowly on his left earlobe. He seemed to be studying the woman carefully as if he wanted to remember her face.

"I imagine your mother finds you changed these days," Shayne said at last.

Naomi Partridge shook her head.

"No, Mr. Shayne, not mother. You see, she is blind."

Shayne blinked. Blind! The idea that had been going around in his mind grew larger and more sinister. The mother was blind. Only Major Craig had kept in touch. The killer had been shuffling papers in Craig's study. Everyone had a perfect alibi.

Shayne stood up. "I imagine you plan to go home soon?"

"I fly back tomorrow," she said. "Tonight is the Reunion."

"So you'll meet them all after all."

"I will. As a matter of fact, Malcolm Douglas is having us all to dinner."

"That should be cosy," Shayne said.

He nodded to the old lady and left. Once outside the house Shayne began to walk rapidly. He stopped in a pub, *The Six Bells*, and called McBain. He told the Inspector to get the valet, Ewen MacErlean, down to his office. Then Shayne flagged a passing taxi in the rain.

VIII

IN HIS OFFICE Inspector McBain sucked on his pipe and did not look convinced. "Anyone could have shot at you, Shayne," he said. "I'm convinced that there's someone in this case we don't know about."

"I think I know who shot at me," Shayne said.

"Do you have any proof?"

"Only an idea right now," Shayne said. "The two things I never could puzzle out were *why* Craig was killed, and why the killer took the time to shuffle papers."

"According to you," McBain said, "Craig was killed because of

his interest in the Von Scarza nonsense."

"Of course he was," Shayne said, "but I mean really *why*. We were bound to connect Craig's death to the Von Scarza affair sooner or later, so it isn't logical for any of them to have killed Craig. Don't you see? The last thing they would have wanted was attention drawn to them."

"Agreed. So it wasn't any of them, which fits because they all have alibies," McBain said drily.

"No," Shayne said, "it was one of them, but the 'why' is something we haven't yet figured out. One of them had to kill Craig before the Reunion, even at the risk of drawing attention to himself."

"What makes you so sure, Shayne?"

"He apparently needed to gain time that Craig, alive, might not have given him," Shayne said. "Everything we do know points to that."

"If you mean time to split the loot? Then we're right back—"

"No, McBain, time for something else. If I'm right, I—"

At that moment the door to McBain's office opened and a constable came in with Ewen MacErlean. The butler was as impassive as ever as he stood waiting to be told what the Inspector wanted to see him about. McBain looked at Shayne.

"MacErlean," Shayne said, "you overheard the Major say



something before he died. According to the record, you said you weren't exactly sure what that something was. McBain, do you have MacErlean's statement?"

McBain opened his black notebook. "Here it is. Ewen said, 'I thought I heard him say, "What the devil do you want"—or—"Who the devil do you think you are"—or something like that.' Is that what you mean, Shayne?"

"Those were his exact words?" Shayne said.

"Yes," McBain said.

Shayne faced MacErlean. "Can you be more specific about what Craig said?"

"Sir?" MacErlean said.

"Think harder," Shayne said. "Was it 'What' or 'Who' that the Major said."

MacErlean's brow creased in thought. "Well, I really don't know, sir. It seems to me that perhaps it was more like 'Who'."

"Could it have been more like, 'Who the devil are you, and what do you want?'" Shayne said.

"Well, yes sir, I think that was just what the Major *did* say," MacErlean said. The butler nodded vigorously. "Yes, now that you put it that way it comes back to me. It would have to mean that . . ."

"That the Major did not know his killer," McBain said, and the Inspector motioned to MacErlean. "All right, Ewen, you can wait outside. In fact, you can go. We won't need you any further today."

The impassive butler left the office without another word. McBain turned to Shayne and laughed aloud.

"There you are, Shayne. Craig did not recognize his killer. He did not know the man, and he knew all five of your favorite suspects very well."

"Too well," Shayne said.

"So we're right back to a common burglar," McBain said.

Shayne shook his head. "A burglar who stole nothing, and killed Craig on sight? No, McBain. A burglar would have seen Craig through the french doors before he ever broke in. No, our killer came to kill Craig, and he timed it precisely."

"How do you mean, *timed* it?" McBain said, his face puzzled as he puffed on his pipe and watched Shayne.

"Did it occur to you, McBain, that Craig was killed early enough so that none of our five were here in London, as far as we know, but late enough so that they were all more-or-less on their way? I mean, none of them could have known about the murder of Craig until this morning, right?"

"Meaning?" McBain said.

"Meaning that the plans for splitting up the Von Scarza loot were probably underway before Craig was killed," Shayne said. "In fact, I'm sure of it. The killer could hardly have been in any doubt on that score. If the others had heard about Craig's murder in time, they would probably have called off the splitting. A few more months wouldn't matter."

"Provided that there was anything to split," McBain said, "Which there isn't a shred of real evidence to prove."

But Mike Shayne was not listening now. The gaunt-faced detective was deep in thought, his grey eyes steely with concentration.

"The killer wants the loot. That has to be why he killed Craig. He wouldn't have taken so great a risk unless he knew the money was within his grasp," Shayne said slowly. "The question is how do they plan to get away with it with the police watching them?"

McBain was about to make a sharp comment when the door to

the office opened and a disconsolate Tim Rourke walked in. The Miami reporter slumped into one of McBain's hard chairs and glared morosely at Shayne. The redhead raised a shaggy eyebrow as he looked at the lean and disgruntled figure of his friend.

"Well, I hope you did better than I did," Rourke said. "I've been checking on them all day. Not one suspicious move by any of them, Mike. The only one who went anywhere at all was Bannerman, and he just drove out to the airport."

Shayne sat alert. "The airport? When?"

"About an hour ago, Mike," Rourke said. "But he didn't do anything. He just picked up his trunk and drove straight back to town. He went to Douglas's place. They're all there having a big reunion."

Shayne jumped up. "Damn it, of course! Douglas! The trip to Amsterdam! I should have known."

"I have a man watching the house, Shayne," McBain said evenly.

"A man?" Shayne said. "One man?"

"They can't get any treasure out of England, Shayne," McBain said. "We're an Island, remember?"

"They already have, McBain," Shayne said. "And I'm not worried about a treasure now. If I'm

right, I'm worried about another killing. We better get out there fast!"

IX

THE TOWN HOUSE of Malcolm Douglas was a blaze of light in the center of its small grounds. There was the sound of distant laughter from somewhere in the rear of the house. The constable who was watching the dwelling explained to Inspector McBain.

"They're in the rear parlor, sir. Nothing unusual."

"Where are their cars?" Shayne snapped.

"Behind the house, in the alley. I walked back once, all five cars are there," the constable said.

"Did anyone carry anything in?" McBain said. "A trunk, perhaps?"

"No sir. Nothing but umbrellas went in, and the lady's handbag, of course," the constable said.

Another burst of laughter came from the house. From where they watched across the street in the dark night rain, Shayne, Rourke and McBain turned to look at the lighted windows.

The constable smiled. "They're certainly in high spirits, sir," he said. "The postman must have brought very good news."

Shayne whirled toward the constable. "Postman? You mean a mailman was there? When?"

"About twenty minutes ago,"

the constable said. "But don't worry, sir. I talked to him when he came out. Old Morris is the regular postman here. He only delivered a special delivery letter. Nothing big enough to have anything valuable in it."

"Special delivery?" Shayne said. "From Amsterdam, maybe?"

"Why, yes sir, how did you know that?" the constable said.

But Mike Shayne did not answer. The big redhead strode straight for the front door of the house across the street. Rourke ran to follow. McBain swore as he caught up with Shayne.

"Damn it, Shayne, what are you up to?"

"Send some of your men to cover the rear, McBain. And hurry up or we may have four more corpses!" Shayne cried.

Shayne knocked loudly on the front door. When the same servant answered, Shayne pushed past him without a word and strode down the elegant hall toward a rear room where the sound of voices could be heard.

McBain angrily followed, with Rourke bringing up the rear with two of McBain's men. As Shayne strode into the rear parlor of the house, the five people turned to look at him.

For a long minute no one moved. The five people stared at Shayne, McBain and Rourke. They were all seated around a long table. The single window of

the small back parlor was shuttered. Glasses stood on the long table. It had all the aspect of a party. In the center of the table was a long white envelope still unopened. Malcolm Douglas was the first to move.

"What the devil is the meaning of this, Inspector!" Douglas snapped. "Do you have a warrant?"

McBain glanced once at Shayne, and then turned to face Douglas. The Inspector's face was completely impassive. Whatever doubts he had he was hiding for the moment.

"In due time, Mr. Douglas," McBain said. "Now we just want to ask a few questions."

Shayne's grey eyes were fixed on the slim envelope on the table.

"Very simple and modern," Shayne said, nodding toward the envelope. "But, then, you aren't really criminals, are you? Just five people who took an opportunity and had the patience to wait."

"Ye are a meddlin' fool, Mr. Shayne," Alistair MacKenzie said. And the tall Scot grinned. "But ye'll never prove it now."

"Shut up, MacKenzie!" Bannerman snapped. The American was standing up close to the table, but now he started to walk toward Shayne. "I don't think you have any warrant, eh? Suppose you all just get out of Douglas's house and be quick about it!"

Shayne barely glanced at Bannerman as the American continued to walk toward him. His grey eyes were looking carefully around the small room. Naomi Partridge and Paul MacLeod had said nothing. The woman seemed weak suddenly, and held onto the back of a chair at the long table. Shayne stared at her.

MacLeod sneered at Mike Shayne. "What do you think is simple and modern?" the little Canadian said.

"Bank drafts, I should guess," Shayne said simply. "Five separate bank drafts mailed here from Amsterdam. I don't know exactly what Von Scarza' treasure was, but I'd guess it was a fortune in diamonds or something like that. Douglas took them to Amsterdam and sold them. He had the money made into bank drafts and mailed here."

Malcolm Douglas laughed. "That would be hard to prove. Bank drafts have no name on them. I think you—"

Douglas stopped. The ex-sergeant swayed and put his hand up to his head. McBain and Rourke stared at Douglas. Then Paul MacLeod began to shake his head and rub his eyes. Alistair MacKenzie began to swear. Naomi Partridge sat down heavily.

Shayne watched them all, and then his grey eyes narrowed as he looked at a thick-looking umbrella hooked over the back of



one of the chairs at the long table. Shayne whirled. George Bannerman was almost at the door leading out of the room.

"Grab him, McBain!" Shayne cried.

The American made a dash for the door. McBain shouted an order. The two men McBain had left in the hall rushed to block the door. Bannerman clawed inside his jacket. The American's hand was half way out holding a pistol with a silencer on it when the two constables wrestled him cursing to the floor.

Shayne did not even look at Bannerman. He was shouting to Rourke and McBain again.

"Get them out, all of them! Hurry! Get them out fast!"

Rourke took hold of the Partridge woman who seemed barely able to stand. McBain herded a groggy Paul MacLeod and Malcolm Douglas from the room. Alistair MacKenzie wobbled, but the big Scot was able to walk by himself.

Shayne pushed them all out of

the small room, down the rear hall, and out into the rainy night of the back alley. They had taken no more than a few steps out of the house when there was a powerful, but muffled explosion behind them.

They all turned to stare. Flames were already licking through the shutters of the single window of the small back parlor which they had just left.

X

THE ROOM OF Douglas's house burned like a forced draft furnace. Even as Shayne watched the flames leaped up toward the second floor. The hall they had been in was a wall of flame. In the distance through the rain the sound of the fire engines was already growing louder.

"Good God," McBain said softly.

"Theremite and napalm, I'd say," Shayne said. "A very professional incendiary bomb. In the umbrella, of course."

McBain looked around at where the four people lay on the ground. All but MacKenzie were unconscious. The tall Scot sat groggily against a wall on the far side of the alley.

"Drugged," McBain said, his lips set in tight lines. "They would have been just about out cold when the bomb went off."

"And Bannerman would have had all the loot," Shayne said.

Tim Rourke had been listening. Now the lean reporter looked toward where Bannerman sat on the ground with the two constables standing over him.

"But, Mike, how could he hope to get away with it?" Rourke said. "We'd have found four bodies, and Bannerman missing. The police would have gotten him in an hour!"

"The bank drafts!" McBain said. "They were in the room!"

"No," Shayne said. "I think if you search Bannerman you'll find the bank drafts. I'd guess he palmed them, and put another envelope on the table. He was ready to move when we came in. He had drugged all the drinks, and he had set the fuse on the bomb. He'd have waited until they started to get groggy, ran out, locked the room door, and waited outside for the fire to start. They could never have gotten out of that room in time the way they were drugged."

"But, damn it, Mike," Rourke protested. "We'd still have found only four bodies, and Bannerman would have been—"

"No, Tim, we'd have found *five* bodies—and the *five right bodies*. They would have been badly burned, but probably still identifiable through teeth, fingerprints, scars, all that."

Now Inspector McBain swore.

"How could we have found five bodies, Shayne, when Bannerman was out of the room?"

"You said it yourself, McBain," Shayne said. "There was someone in this case we didn't know anything about. Of course, we really did know him, but we didn't know we knew him."

Shayne turned and walked to the rear of one of the five cars parked in the alley. He opened the trunk of the car. A large black trunk was in the car-trunk. Shayne motioned to one of the constables. Two constables lifted the trunk out and rested it on the ground.

"It'll be unlocked," Shayne said. "He didn't have much time."

The constables opened the trunk. In the trunk was the bent and twisted body of a man.

"Meet the real George Bannerman," Shayne said.

The redhead turned to look at the man who sat on the ground between the policemen.

"I'm not sure who our killer is, McBain," Shayne said. "But my guess would be he's someone who was very close to Helmut Von Scarza. He killed Bannerman out at the airport, and took his place."

On the ground the man who had called himself George Bannerman suddenly began to curse. The man swore in clear, precise German. From where he sat the man glared hatred up at Shayne.

"You will find out, very well,"

the man said. "I waited for twenty-five years to kill those swine. English pigs! Who am I, you ask? I am Siegfried Von Scarza, and those swine killed my brother! I only regret that I failed!"

The next day Mike Shayne and Tim Rourke sat in Inspector McBain's office. Their bags were beside them as they listened to McBain tell of Von Scarza's confession.

"After the war Siegfried wanted to revenge his brother. He posed as an ex-Cameron and got their names from Major Craig. Then he came across Craig's old charges at the inquiry, and he got greedy and wanted the loot as well as revenge.

"Of course, he didn't know at first what his brother had been carrying any more than we did. But he found out from his other brother, Lothar, who was a war-criminal. He says that Lothar said Helmut had taken a fortune in diamonds! After that Siegfried became just plain greedy. Revenge wasn't enough."

In the quiet office Mike Shayne nodded. Outside there was the sound of rain falling steadily again, and the muffled noise of London traffic.

"It was quite an ingenious plan he came up with," Shayne said. "You see, he had no idea where the loot was. He had to wait until the five made their move. It was a long wait, but it gave him time to

think and plan. He watched them all carefully over the years. He found he looked most like George Bannerman. He went to America, even to Tarrytown, and practiced being an American. He even noticed that Bannerman got the *London Times* regularly all these years, and guessed that when the call came it would be printed in the *Times*."

"MacLeod told me that part," McBain said. "After they hid the diamonds, taking a few each to get a little ready cash for after the war, they agreed to wait at least twenty-five years for the rest. As a safety measure each one carried the confession of one of the others. None of them knew who had his confession. You see, they actually killed Helmut Von Scarza in cold blood. I'm not sure what we can do about that now, but we're looking into it.

"They had decided never to see each other or communicate in any way, so the notice in the *Times* was cooked up. It was MacKenzie who placed the notices. Douglas then got the diamonds and fenced them in Amsterdam. Von Scarza had to wait for those notices because he needed them to lead him to the jewels."

Shayne nodded again. "When he was sure the plan was under-way, he killed Craig, waited for Bannerman to arrive in London, met Bannerman, and killed him too. He then showed up at the ho-

tel in Bannerman's place. It gave him his perfect alibi, because the real Bannerman had been in Tarrytown at the time of Craig's murder."

Tim Rourke had been looking from McBain to Shayne and back again all this time. Now the lean reporter could contain himself no longer. He burst out furiously: "You're both talking like Von Scarza and Bannerman were twins! They weren't. They didn't look that much alike! How could Von Scarza hope to fool everyone?"

Shayne shrugged. "He did, Tim, didn't he? You see, *that was why he killed Major Craig*. None of them had seen each other, or communicated, in over twenty years. The Partridge woman's mother was blind, you see, Tim? I mean, it occurred to me that her mother would not know if she was *really* Naomi Partridge. That gave me the clue. In over twenty years men can change. I realized that *none of them really knew exactly what the others would look like now!*

"But Major Craig had kept in touch with all five. Craig *would* know what the real George Bannerman looked like. Von Scarza was aware of Craig's interest in the affair, and that Craig planned to show up at the reunion. He would know that Von Scarza was an imposter. On top of that, Craig had a recent snapshot of Banner-

man, of all of them. With Craig dead, the police would get the files, would know the real George Bannerman."

"Then why didn't they?" Rourke cried. "McBain even talked to Von Scarza pretending to be Bannerman!"

"Because Von Scarza had changed snapshots," Shayne said simply. "That was the paper shuffling MacErlean heard. All Von Scarza needed was a little time. Once he had met with the other four, he would have had the loot, and we would have found five badly burned bodies. No one would ever have known there had been an imposter. The five alibies would have stood up, because they were true, and the five bodies would have been the right bodies."

McBain shook his head admiringly. "I still don't know how you guessed it. Especially that it was Bannerman."

"He was good, but not that good," Shayne said. "I suppose

my subconscious was looking for an imposter. You see, McBain, I had five people with perfect alibies, and yet I was sure one of them had to be a killer. If the alibies were bonafide, *then one of the people had to be false*. When I went to visit Bannerman, he made a few tiny slips.

"He ate European style, fork in the left hand, knife in the right. He called Scotch, *whisky*. That's an English trait because you have only one whisky. In America we call it Scotch. Then he used the phrases 'in hospital' and 'Kraut.' Now in America we say 'in the hospital.' In England soldiers called the Germans *Jerries*, not Krauts. I couldn't see a man who said 'in hospital' also saying 'Krauts.' They didn't go together. It wasn't much, but it gave me a hint. With the other guesses, it was enough."

"For Siegfried Von Scarza it was too much," Inspector McBain said.

DEAD MAN'S WALK

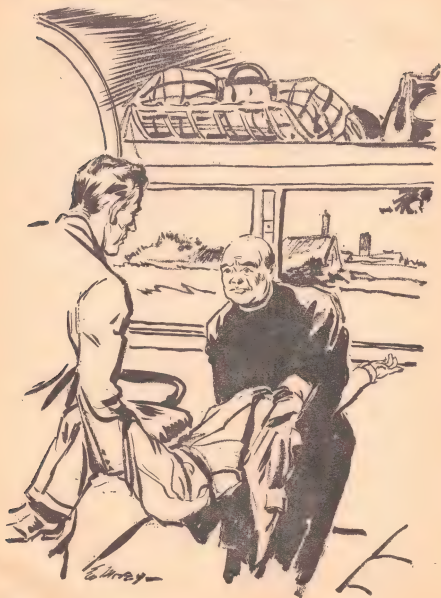
by Brett Halliday

It's MIKE SHAYNE

It's Hard-Hitting!

It's Complete Next Month!

A DRAMATIC SECRET INTELLIGENCE NOVELET



MR. SMITH GOES TO BERLIN

by ROBERT EDMOND ALTER

It was the kind of spy and counter-spy operation that gave Death a vested interest in the outcome . . . no matter whom the odds favored.

THE PRIEST joined the Hannover-Berlin train at Helmstedt. John S. Breck found the clerically-garbed gentleman in his compartment when he returned from the complexities of the Vopo checkpoint. Breck had a huge unwieldy portmanteau which had given him considerable trouble at the outside door, and the priest instantly arose from his seat to assist him with it.

"It's a cumbersome old affair," Breck admitted. "But my father gave it to me the day I entered the Foreign Office and I've been packing it about the world ever since."

The priest was short and in-

clined to be tubby and he had a bland face containing a cherub's smile. "I know," he said. "They become like an old friend, don't they?"

Breck was still nettled over the handling he'd received at the Vopo customs. "They made me dump the entire contents out on a table," he complained. "Then you should have seen the way they pawed through it. I thought they only worried about export smuggling."

The priest chuckled. "They were probably looking for soap."

"Soap?"

"Umm. An everyday commod-

ity to you and me. But when you live in a land where it is as scarce as gold it becomes quite important. The Vopos palm every bar of it they can."

Breck was mildly surprised at the use of the superlative. 'Palm' seemed a rather secular word for a priest.

"You're a diplomat, then?" the priest said. "On your way to the Conference in West Berlin?"

"Yes." Then Breck felt an inclination to explain, or excuse, his method of transportation. "I probably should have taken one of the air corridors like the other delegates. But I thought it would be educational to see more of the country at first-hand through a train window. The contrast between West and East Germany, you know."

The priest nodded, glancing out the windows. A green-uniformed Vopo with a burp gun slung over his shoulder was strolling along the passenger dock peering into each compartment with cold hostile eyes.

"Yes," the priest said. "Contrast."

Breck had the impression that the priest was about to continue, when the corridor door opened and a little thin man of no definable age entered. He looked first at Breck, and then at the priest, and finally took the corner seat by the door. He put a cigarette in his mouth, lit it, snapped back his

sleeve to glance at a wristwatch, and sat there smoking immobily, not once touching the cigarette with his hands.

The priest reached into his cassock and produced a small breviary which immediately engrossed him. Evidently, Breck decided, their conversation had reached the termination point. He settled back and watched the mammoth barrier of low-lying buildings slide by as the train drew out of the checkpoint. Now they were in East Germany.

A conductor entered with the air of a police official and demanded to see tickets all around, which annoyed Breck because he had already shown this same man his ticket at Braunschweig and Hannover.

The conductor eyed the bulky portmanteau with distaste.

"You'll have to put that up on the rack overhead. Passengers have to sit in here, you know." Then he turned his authority on the little thin man. "No smoking in the compartments!" Scowling heavily, he departed.

The thin man glanced at his wristwatch. The priest remained in his breviary. Breck watched the fields and orchards sweep past the windows.

The train was obviously making good time. Breck heard a disembodied voice in the corridor announce: "Magdeburg—fifteen minutes!"

As though it had been a Cas-

sandra call, the little thin man stood right up, opened the door, and stepped outside, closing it carefully after him. Breck turned to the priest with a smile, about to say, "The little man acts as if we were already there."

But a remarkable change had come over the priest. He tossed the breviary aside as if it were a girly magazine he'd picked up by accident, and he came to his feet with amazing alacrity. He stepped over to the corridor door and pulled down the three blinds. "Just remain right where you are, Mr. Smith," he said.

Breck blinked at him. "I beg your pardon, Father?"

The priest returned. He pulled the blind on the outside door and reached over Breck's head to pull the blind on that window all the way down.

"Remember, please—when I say 'Mr. Smith' from now on, I mean you."

He stood in the aisle looking sharply around with an expression of pouty intentness. Breck, leaning stiffly back in his shadowy corner, stared at him with expectant dread. That he was now sharing the darkened compartment with a madman he had no doubt, and he quickly decided that a passive attitude was most advisable.

Someone had left a newspaper on the floor and the priest pounced upon it, sat himself by the window opposite Breck, snapped the paper

open and spread it upright in front of himself.

"If I'm not mistaken, we'll have a couple of unwelcome visitors shortly," he told Breck. "Just stay where you are. I'll take care of everything. Don't pay any attention to me."

Numbly Breck nodded his head, then shook it, agreeably. He thought about making a bolt for the door. And right then the door opened and the little thin man and a man in a trenchcoat came in and seemed to pile up on each other as they stood there with the now closed door at their backs. They seemed annoyed by the dimness of the compartment.

They looked at the silhouette of the priest sitting behind the newspaper in front of the only unblinded window and their annoyance became more pronounced.

"Herr Breck?" the little thin man asked.

Breck cleared his throat tentatively. "Yes?"

"We'll reach Magdeburg in about ten minutes. You'll have to leave the train with us then." The thin man had his right hand in his coat-pocket and he began to remove it as he started to say: "Don't make any protest, or—"

Abruptly the newspaper in front of the priest blew open with a *spamp! spamp!* and the little thin man was flung back against his companion. His chin snapped up and the top of his head caught the

man behind him on the point of his chin.

That man was trying to get himself clear of his sagging friend when the priest threw the newspaper aside and Breck saw what he held in his right hand. It was the last thing in the world he expected to see there.

The silencer went *spamp!* again, and the man in the trenchcoat jackknifed into the aisle, and collapsed forward on his face.

Breck gasped with horror, then started to cough as the throat-constricting cordite fumes swept into his mouth. He pulled up backwards, trying to wedge himself deeper into the angle of the wall, expecting the madman to turn that damned silencer on him next.

The priest was already on his feet, stepping over the two tangled bodies in the aisle without a glance he pulled the blind on the door slightly aside and glanced swiftly up and down the empty corridor.

II

JOHN BRECK found his voice, if not his wits. "My God, Father—you shot them!"

The priest turned back with a sudden flashing grin. "More than that, I'm afraid. I killed them." He glanced at the bodies critically. "I probably didn't need the second shot at the little fellow. But it's damned awkward firing from the waist from behind a newspaper,"

he explained. "Better to be sure."

The silencer disappeared somewhere inside the capacious cassock as he stepped over to the outside door, raised the blind, and looked ahead.

"You can see the smoke from the Magdeburg factories. We'll be pulling in shortly," he said, giving Breck a sober look. "I realize this is disconcerting for you, and I wish we had time for me to go into extensive detail. But we don't. Briefly, my name is Colonel Luft. I'm a counter-espionage agent for the West."

Luft nodded at the dead men. "These two gentlemen were Red agents. They had orders to remove you from the train at Magdeburg, incognito, and to hold you in East Germany until the Conference in West Berlin had terminated. I know this because it is my job to know it. What I mean to say is—I know *when* something like this is to happen. But I don't always know *why*."

"Bu—bū—" Breck wet his lips and started again. "But I don't understand. I'm only Sir Harry Winthold's subordinate. What could they hope to gain by kidnaping me?"

"I told you, Mr. Smith—I don't know why they see fit to do the things they do. I could make a guess, though. They know from the Paris Conference last year that Sir Harry is a rather monolithic and taciturn diplomat, who is in-

clined to let *you* make and argue most of the points. So it's quite possible that with your absence, they felt that Sir Harry would be at a loss when he reached the Conference table."

"But I still don't see—"

"They want the Conference to fail, Mr. Smith. And at the same time they want it to look as though the reason for the failure was the fault of the West. Can't you see? You disappear, and Sir Harry is left stranded and baffled. The East immediately raises hell in the newspapers. The world shakes its head wonderingly: Why hasn't Breck shown up? The Conference fails. Then Breck is 'discovered' by Communist reporters with cameras—in a cozy little lovenest somewhere."

"You're joking!"

"No, I'm assuming a very likely possibility. That's the way *I'd* work it if I were acting for the communists. Things like that are arranged every day. Look at your divorce cases in America."

Luft shot another look out the window. "We really must do something about these bodies," he said. "We can't just dump them out the door. The passengers in the other coaches would be bound to see them bouncing along the siding and kick up an awful row."

He stooped and inspected the two corpses. "The little fellow has decided to become troublesome," he said irritably. "He's bleeding



profusely. Fortunately the other one seems to be behaving himself. Better give me a hand. We'll get the big one by the feet, and stretch him out on the seat."

Breck blew out his breath. "Really, Col—"

"This is no time for squimishness, Mr. Smith! The Reds would crow with delight if they could hang a murder charge on you."

"On me?"

"Certainly. You don't think they'd bother with me, do you? Even if I confessed to the killing. They would dispose of me to keep my mouth shut, but you, Mr. Smith, would get the nod for this mess."

"But I don't see—"

"Mr. Smith. Try to remember that we are now in East Germany.

Our Red friends are in command here. They can do anything they feel like doing. And right now they want to topple the Conference, and you are their chosen keystone. Now take his feet."

Breck took the man in the trenchcoat by the feet, lifted him to the seat and laid him on his back. Luft folded the dead man's hands neatly on his chest and spread the bullet-punctured newspaper over the stark-eyed face. He frowned at the thin corpse that was being bothersome with its bleeding. Then he looked at Breck's portmanteau.

"Remove all the articles from your bag. I think we can do it."

"Now wait, Colonel," he protested. "There are limits—"

"For godsake don't you realize I'm knocking myself dead to save your reputation and maybe your life? Not to mention the Conference? Don't you understand that I've just killed two men to that end?"

Oh yes, Breck understood that Luft had just killed two men. How could he help but understand it? He pulled down the portmanteau and emptied the contents on the floor.

What he did next—or assisted in doing—he imagined would return to him in nightmares for the rest of his life.

"On his back," Luft instructed. "Just as if we were putting him in a clamshell. Now—the legs folded

at the knees, so. That's right. Push them down over the stomach. It's damned lucky he's such a small little devil. Now the arms. Fold them at the elbows—"

The engine whistle blew twice shrilly, and Breck jumped and dropped one of the arms.

"Get ahold of yourself!" Luft warned impatiently. "We don't have a minute to waste. Bring that arm up to his chest—no, *no!* Can't you do something with the fingers? Make a fist of them."

"You make a fist of them!" Breck cried. "I don't want to touch them—"

The train lurched, steadied, lurched again. Then, gradually, the forward momentum slackened. Breck glanced over his shoulders and saw concrete walls sliding slowly past the windows.

"See if you can do something with the feet," Luft was saying. "Force them down at the ankles."

Abruptly the door behind Luft clattered in its frame. Breck's head snapped up. The handle was turning, the door starting to open. He lost his hold on one of the legs. The little thin man rolled to the right bonelessly. His left arm flew out.

The door could only travel two inches inward. Then it struck the soles of Luft's shoes and jarred. Luft grimaced and pivoted on his knees, caught the handle on the inside and held it steady as he stood up. He put his benignly smiling face to the crack and spoke

solemnly to someone in the corridor.

"I'm sorry. Could you use another compartment? I'm hearing a confession in here. Thank you so very much." He closed the door.

Breck said, "Isn't there a lock on the door?"

"The communists don't approve of privacy. They only have locks on their prisons. All right, let's fold him up again."

They did it, barely. Luft started the zipper up his side to the top, saying, "Take it. I've got to dispose of your clothes."

He grabbed the other long narrow seat cushion, yanked it forward, and began piling Breck's shirts, linen, toilet articles inside the hollow frame. "Any thing here with your name on it?" he asked.

Breck couldn't think. He shook his head, gnawing at his underlip. The zipper was giving him trouble. The train had stopped. Outside he could hear the insistent bedlam of many disembodied voices.

The zipper snagged and Breck's trembling fingers slipped off. "It's caught on his pantsleg!" he groaned. "I can't—"

Luft said an old Anglo-Saxon word, shoved the seat back in place, and turned to fight the zipper. Breck tried to help.

"All right—be careful. I'm getting it. There!"

The outside door swung open and a small boy in shortpants

jumped into the compartment with a brilliant glare of sunlight.

"Mutter! Come see the priest! He's praying!"

The boy's mother appeared with a distrustful look in her hard eyes.

"Helmut! (she pronounced it *Hel-moot*) Close your mouth!"

Luft stood up with a benevolent smile. "*Guten morgen, Frau.*"

The woman gave him a quick, iron-eyed, searching look. "*Jawohl,*" she said crisply. Evidently she had come around to the Red way of thinking—regarding religion and men of the cloth with distaste. Or maybe she was an emotional hangover from the Hitler regime.

Breck sat across from her and didn't know what to do with his hands. They were trembling so badly he thought everyone would notice. Luft sat beside her with his cherub's smile and picked up the discarded breviary.

Helmut walked over to the dead man on the seat with Breck and stood with his hands behind his back regarding the faceless man with the intense air of eight-year-old speculation.

Breck looked at Luft. The Colonel smilingly opened his breviary.

A heavyset man crowded into the compartment bearing two suitcases. He glowered at the bulky portmanteau blocking his path.

"Allow me," Luft said, rising to take one of the man's bags. They set the two suitcases on the bag-

gage rack. Then the heavysset man looked at the man in the trench-coat and gave a snort of contempt.

"No consideration," he complained. "This isn't a bedroom." He stepped over the portmanteau and settled himself stolidly beside Luft.

"Hel-moot! Kommen Sie hier!"

Helmut didn't want to. He wanted to know about the man under the newspaper. "What is the man doing, Mutter?"

"Sleeping."

"Not reading?"

"Dummkopf! How can he read with the paper on his nose?"

"Why does he have those little holes in the paper?"

"Why would anyone keep this great suitcase in the center of the aisle?" the woman replied snappishly. "Don't ask me!"

Helmut leaned forward from the waist to peer at the bullet holes in the newspaper. Breck swallowed and opened his mouth.

"Those are so he can breath," he said quickly. He was alarmed at the gravelly sound of his own voice. Luft looked up with a quick grin. But the inspirational answer seemed reasonable to Helmut. He nodded wisely.

The train started with an abrupt jolt which nearly rolled the dead man from his berth. His left arm flopped out from under the paper and his hand struck the floor. Everyone looked at him expectantly.

"I believe the gentleman has

been drinking," Luft said mildly, his eyes sweeping the compartment to indicate the explanation was intended for everyone.

The woman sniffed her contempt. The heavysset man snorted.

The conductor stalked in and was immediately outraged at the sight of the prone man under the newspaper. "Was is this?" He flipped his fingertips against the paper rapidly, creating a muted *tap-a-tat-tat* that sounded like a drum roll in Breck's ears.

"Drunk," the heavysset man told him shortly.

"Ach!" The conductor turned his outrage on Breck's portmanteau. "Didn't I tell you to put this monster up above?"

Breck wet his lips. "I prefer to keep it handy."

"Ach so!" The conductor reached for the handle to do the job himself. The portmanteau barely budged. He blinked and tried again. Then he looked at Breck fiercely. "Rocks?"

"Books."

"Tickets!" the conductor ordered in a passion.

III

THE TRAIN rattled across a viaduct with iron-clanging intensity, and Breck saw the Elbe River glittering like a dropped strip of sheet-metal below. Then they were rolling for Burg, where the Elbe-Havel canal commenced.

Presently Luft came over to squeeze himself between Breck and the dead man's feet. "Did you know that the canals bring a third of West Berlin's raw materials, Mr. Smith?" he said informatively. "The barges haul in coal and oil to help stockpile the Western sectors. During the winter, when the canals freeze . . ." His voice droned on, going lower and lower.

The other passengers had no interest in what he was saying. Breck didn't either, until he heard Luft whisper: "We're going to be in trouble when we reach Burg. Our two cold friends must have made arrangements to meet other agents once they had removed you from the train in Magdeburg. Those agents are now going to be very disturbed. They will be almost sure to wire ahead to Burg and arrange to have the Vopos there inspect the train."

"What will we do?" Breck asked, his voice tremulous with concern.

"We're going to have to misdirect the attention of the Vopos. We're going to take the places of our two dead friends and play the part of Red agents."

Breck had turned a little pale. "We can't," he protested. "We'll never get away with it."

"We have no choice," Luft whispered. "I have the little man's wallet and papers in my pocket. I think they'll turn the trick—at least long enough for us to get clear of the train."

"Leave the train? You mean at Burg?"

"Certainly. Don't you understand? We're on the run now—have been ever since we crossed the Elbe."

From the window Breck watched the town of Burg grow out of the land. The whistle screamed hauntingly. Luft put his breviary away and stood up. "Well, I believe this is where you detain, Mr. Smith," he said in a normal voice.

Breck nodded shortly. "Y-yes." He rose and started to edge by the seat with the dead man.

"Uh—Mr. Smith. You're forgetting your bag."

"My—oh. Oh yes, my bag."

"Let me help you with it," Luft said.

Breck on one side, Luft on the other, they took the bag by the handle and lifted. Breck felt the entire bag give. They started lurching for the corridor. Breck stepped on the dead man's hand in passing and a jolt of revulsion tingled through his body.

They had a bad time getting the brute through the door, and an even worse time in the narrow corridor. There just wasn't enough room for Luft's tubby body, the side-bulging portmanteau, and Breck.

"Hurry," Luft whispered urgently. "I've got to get to the men's room."

It was the last statement in the world that Breck expected to

hear at that moment. "Oh Good Lord, Colonel!"

"To change my clothes, you fool!" Luft snapped.

An absolute Sidney Greenstreet of a man was bearing down on them. There was simply no possible way for the fat man to get by them and, unfortunately, he also seemed to be in a hurry.

"Let me through," he said, shoving his vast bulk against the jam-up of Breck, Luft, and portmanteau. "I'm getting off here."

"So are we," Luft told him. "Go back, can't you?"

"You go back. I was in the corridor first."

Breck looked out the windows and saw rows of idle freight trains in the yard flashing by. Then the train began to catch and go, catch and go, slowing. He saw a Soviet army truck turn into the yard and start along a dirt road running parallel with the tracks. Armed soldiers were sitting in the rear of the vehicle. Luft saw it too.

"You ugly son, if you don't get out of our way I'll take hold of your fat neck and twist it right off your shoulders," he snarled.

Breck didn't think it was the threat so much that threw the fat man into a startled-eyed retreat as it was the person who had made it. After all, you didn't expect to hear a priest speak out in such a worldly manner.

They reached the men's room, and Luft said, "All I have to do is

slip out of the cassock. I'm dressed for the street underneath. Just sit tight with the bag."

"Colonel, why do we have to keep lugging the damned thing about?"

Luft said nothing. He pointed to the top of the portmanteau. JOHN S. BRECK was engraved into the leather in rusty gold. Luft disappeared behind the door.

I'm stuck with this beastly thing, Breck thought, looking worriedly out the window again. *It's just like a signed confession to murder.*

Luft was back almost immediately. He was wearing black pants and a black coat. He nodded to Breck and they raised the heavy bag and lugged it over to the coach door. The train had stopped and Breck could see a myriad of armed Vopos out on the dock, looking very alert and efficient.

Luft gave him a searching look. "You simply must do something about your expression," he said. "Don't step out there looking like a man who is carrying a dead man in his suitcase. Can't you look a trifle nonchalant? And concerned too, of course. Nonchalantly concerned. Think of Alan Ladd."

Breck concentrated on looking like Alan Ladd. He rather doubted that he was very successful.

The door opened. Two Vopos came at them. Luft muttered, "Here we go." And they stepped down and Luft flipped open his wallet with an air of impatient author-

ity. "Where's your officer, sergeant?"

The sergeant hesitated, looking at Luft, Breck, and the wallet

"*Bei Dir piept's wohl?*" Luft said testily.

The soldier flushed in mute anger. Presumbaly he didn't like to be told that he had birds in the brain. But he called to a lieutenant, and Luft showed the dead man's card again, saying, "You received word from Magdeburg?"

"*Jawohl, Herr Besserung—*"

"No names! No names!" Luft said warningly. "This is extremely hush-hush. Didn't they tell you that?"

The lieutenant nodded stiffly.

"We encountered a hitch," Luft told him. "An unavoidable accident. The party most concerned in this matter has been shot. He's in this coach, compartment D. You'd better go in with some of your men and take charge. We'll have to hold up the train until I receive further orders from Magdeburg. Where's the wireless here?"

"In the office, *mein Herr.*" Then the lieutenant gave the portmanteau an inquiring nod. "And that is—"

"Yes. His bag. The SHM will want to see it. Get your men moving."

Luft nodded to Breck and they raised the portmanteau and hurried toward a door bearing the label AUSKUNFT.

There were no Vopos in the wait-



ing room. But that fact didn't do much to dissolve the constriction in Breck's chest. They were out of the frying pan but they were still very much in the fire.

"Do you have private touring cars here?" Colonel Luft asked the clerk.

"Yes. One. But it's out at the moment. There are buses though."

"To Berlin?"

"No. The one leaving now is a sightseeing tour to Brandenburg—"

"*Nein, nein*," Luft said impatiently.

"And the other leaves shortly for Potsdam."

Luft appeared to be considering it. He nodded. "Well, that's nearly to Berlin. Thank you."

They went through the rear door and were confronted by two ancient three-ton buses. The one on their left was jarring and clattering ominously and throwing off a great river of bluish-white exhaust. Luft turned toward it.

"This is the one for Brandenburg. When things begin to pop on the train the Vopos might be thrown off the scent when they check with that clerk. He'll tell 'em we took the Potsdam bus, which will fit in nicely with the well-known fact that you are on your way to Berlin."

The bus was crowded and noisy and there was the smell of sausage. The driver complained about the portmanteau. Only small handbags were allowed inside the bus.

Large baggage had to be stowed on the roof.

"Care to try it?" Luft offered with a wry smile.

So the driver gave it a heft, or tired to, and shook his head.

"What is it—cement blocks for the Concrete Curtain?" he quipped.

"No. Just a dead body."

"Very funny. All right, leave it up here in front."

Breck and Luft found seats two rows back from the portmanteau, but not together. They sat across the aisle from one another. Breck was next to a young man with unruly hair and deepset, intense eyes. The young man spoke to him in English.

"You're American, aren't you? Or English? Your clothes look it. I'm an exchange student myself, from New York. I have a hell of a time with German though. I'll be glad when the day comes—as it surely must from all indications—that English is the universal language. My name's Crane. Steve Crane."

"Steve Crane?" Breck echoed, absently sensing a vague correlation with something familiar. The young man smiled delightedly.

"Calls Stephen Crane to your mind, doesn't it? He's my favorite writer—next to Faulkner. What do you think of William Faulkner?"

"Well, I really don't have too much time for—"

"I think that to start *The Sound*

and the Fury from the point of view of the madman Benjy was a brilliant stroke of genius! I'll concede that his immediate ravings and rantings and abstract ramblings are confusing; but as you begin to emerge into the decline and fall of the Compson family you sense that through this idiot and you get a complete . . ."

Breck sent Luft a look of despair. Luft shrugged slightly and settled back in his seat, closing his eyes.

How can he do that? Breck wondered jealously. How can he relax at a time like this? My God, I wish this fool beside me would shut up!

" . . . always felt that Quinton Compson had his real-life counterpart in Wolfe's brother—aside from the matter of incest, of course. You remember the brother in *Look Homeward Angel* who was forever drifting about looking under every leaf, every stone for an unfound door?"

The way the Communist agents are looking for me, Breck thought bleakly. He stared out the window at the sliding landscape of farmland and forest, grain fields and pines, light and dark. Now and then he saw a farmer working in a field. It seemed to be a land of silence. Then they crossed the railroad tracks and he saw the Elbe-Havel canal again. The erudite and impressionable youth beside him chattered on and on, Heming-

way, Melville, Cozzens, Dostoevsky . . .

Breck's eyes drifted to the portmanteau rocking slightly with the momentum and bounce of the bus. Startled, he straightened and looked again, not wanting to believe what his eyes were trying to show him.

Something very dark was seeping from the bottom rear end of the portmanteau. It was forming a small inky pool.

Wildly, he swung his head toward Luft. The colonel had also spotted it. He was staring at the portmanteau with a rapt look of intense fascination. He glanced at Breck and raised his eyebrows.

The little pool expanded slowly. It glittered and trembled with the motor vibration. Then the bus hit an uneven spot in the autobahn and the pool broke. A dark little thread ran off to the left.

A woman sitting just in front of Breck glanced down and saw the zigzagging thread coming toward her feet. "*Ach!*" She turned and looked at Luft. "Your bag is leaking, *mein Herr.*"

Luft started, as if it were all news to him, and looked greatly vexed. "Damn! It's that bottle of ink." He appealed to the woman for sympathy. "The bag's simply bursting with business ledgers, and I was foolish enough to think I could also carry a jar of ink in there. It looks as though I'm really operating in the *red* now."

The woman tittered in appreciation of the pun, but the bus driver took a more somber view. "We can't have that mess on the floor. Can't you do something about it?"

"All right." Drawing a handkerchief from his pocket, Luft stood up, moved forward and bent above the bag. Breck closed his eyes.

"There's a timber inn a mile along the road where we make a lunch stop," the driver told Luft. "You'll have to get that bag off the bus and do something about that mess."

IV

THE INN WAS in a clearing set back from the road, not far removed from the canal. Luft turned to Breck. "Give me a hand, Mr. Smith?"

They raised the portmanteau and struggled down the steps with it. John Breck glanced down and saw bright red beads glistening in the dust just below the steps. In bright sunlight they didn't look like drops of ink at all.

"Let me help," Steve Crane spoke behind them. "I've been here before. There's a coldwater tap around the back of the building."

"We've got to shake him," Luft whispered. "This is as far as we go."

"We're leaving the bus?"

"Yes. Too risky to go on into Brandenburg."

They went around the corner of the inn. There were four windows set high in the wall overhead. Breck didn't see the faucet Crane had mentioned.

"Put it down," Luft muttered.

They set the bag down and straightened up. Crane was watching them with mild speculation.

"What is that in the bag?" He was looking at Breck now.

"Red ink, as I said," Luft answered.

Crane ignored him. "No, it isn't ink, is it, Mr. Breck?"

It jolted Breck as much as an unexpected blow would have done. His mouth moved in a silent stammer.

"My friend's name is Smith," Luft said casually.

Crane smiled acidly. "That's a rather stupid lie, isn't it? When the bag has his real name engraved on it?" His right hand slipped in and out of his coat smoothly and he pointed a snub-nosed .32 at Luft.

"I don't know who you are, but I'm afraid you made a very serious mistake when you decided to become Mr. Breck's traveling companion."

Breck found his voice, faintly. "Who are you? What are you after?"

"Secret police. We have every possible method of public transportation covered from Helmstedt to West Berlin. We were notified at Burg that something had gone wrong at Magdeburg—that you'd

somehow slipped through. So we took the extra precaution of not having it happen again."

He smiled wryly. "Which it almost did. Those Vopos at Burg are stupid clods. As soon as you stepped aboard the bus I realized who you were and that you'd obviously managed to dodge them."

"But you couldn't have possibly seen the name on my bag then."

"I didn't have to. Your clothes, voice, the look of naked fear in your face, the way you tossed covert glances over your shoulder—"

"Not to mention that you've been studying a detailed and accurate description of him for at least a week," Luft said.

Crane looked at him sharply. "You sound as though you were in the business yourself. Who are you?"

"Only a traveler who happened to meet this gentleman on the train."

"Pity for you. This is a very hush-hush operation. Witnesses are definitely excluded. Now pick up the bag and let's go into the woods."

"Wait—wait a moment," Breck said. "You aren't going to kill him?"

"Sorry, Mr. Breck. But this business concerns only you and the Communists." Crane's intense eyes didn't show his verbal regret.

Breck and Luft picked up the bag again. Crane's last statement had put an idea into Breck's head

but it was so foreign to his deep-seated sense of non-violence that it made a hurly-burly of his nervous system. He stumbled, nearly upsetting bag and Luft.

"Watch it!" Crane snapped.

Breck took a fresh grip on the bag. The dark pines and white birch closed in on them and they walked through a fretwork of brown and green shadows. Breck stumbled again, deliberately. The portmanteau banged down and Luft almost lost his balance over it.

"Can't you be more careful?" Crane demanded.

Breck sucked in his breath and turned around, spreading his arms wide to engulf the Communist. He lumbered for him awkwardly, wildly, crying, "You can't shoot me! You can't—"

The snub-nose .32 jerked toward Breck's chest and Crane's expression was a study of incredulous shock. He stalled on the trigger, and that gave Breck a chance to close with him. The two men fought and struggled for the pistol, Breck trying to force Crane's gun arm up and Crane striking furiously at Breck's face with his free hand.

Then Luft was there, his right arm sweeping in horizontally, the flat edge of his hand dealing a chopping blow across the bridge of Crane's nose, and following it with a flat-hand chop to the back of Crane's neck. Crane's eyes glazed,



and he went down as though legless.

Breck sagged back against a pine, breathing harshly, a swelling bruise on his right temple.

"You surprised me, Mr. Breck," Luft said, kneeling beside the unconscious man and rolling him onto his back. He picked up the .32 in his handkerchief, and set the weapon in Crane's shoulder holster. Then he took a capsule box from his own coat, along with a small hypodermic syringe.

"I suddenly realized that he couldn't shoot me," Breck said. "He didn't have orders to."

Luft grinned fleetingly. "I was hoping you'd realize that. But I didn't think you'd have the guts to do anything about it."

"What are you doing there?" Breck was suddenly suspicious of Luft's orderly preparations.

"Arranging a little suicide," Luft informed him calmly. "These capsules are sleeping pills and I'm going to plant a lethal dose in his stomach—if I can get them down

him. If not the dose in this syringe will do the trick nicely. You see, you inject it right here at the back of the neck, just above the hairline. Almost impossible for a coroner to detect."

Breck was horrified. "You're not serious!"

"I was never more serious," Luft assured him.

"But my God—"

"Wake up!" Luft said sharply. "You don't seem to understand the threat this man is to us—especially to me. Remember, I have to go on living and working in this country. Anyway, he knew the rules of the game when he decided to play—just as I do."

"But to cold-bloodedly—"

"Listen. It's time you realized that you are no longer in *your* world. From the time you and I came together in Helmstedt you have been in the dark glitter of my world. On the surface we look, act, and talk like everyone else. But in our world of counter intelligence, violence and sudden death are of frequent occurrence. We've steeled ourselves to become executioners, whenever we are given no choice.

"You see, it is in the nature of a brotherhood. No matter which side we are on we all belong to the same club. We have our rules and regulations and gentlemen's agreements. To the best of our ability we try to keep our activities neat and clean and quiet, Mr. Breck. So now our friend here is going to

leave us—neatly, cleanly, quietly.”

The silenced pistol shots, the long chase, the choked-off cry in the afternoon woods . . . For a moment Breck felt that he was indeed in the dark glitter of Colonel Luft's twilight world. Then his stomach revolted and he turned away hurriedly and began to retch.

“I think you should take a little walk, Mr. Breck,” Luft said quietly. “Go through the trees a way. I'll join you shortly.”

Mechanically, Breck started walking, only half conscious of the pale flicker of pine trunks on either hand. He wasn't at all certain of his own motivation. He was walking out of a quiet little glen, leaving two men alone together, knowing that one of them was methodically murdering the other.

The rules of the game, Luft had said. The man who called himself Crane had planned to kill the man who called himself Luft, in cold blood. Only now the situation was reversed.

The Elbe-Havel canal was before him now, stretching away in the late brassy sunlight. He stared at it absently. Then his eyes drifted along the bank to a guardshack, one of the control points on the canal, and he stiffened to instant alertness.

Two armed Vopos were coming up from the control point along a diagonal course that would lead them straight to Colonel Luft.

Before Breck could swing about

and head back the way he had come they caught sight of him and started toward him on the run.

At first it was the heavy scrub that saved him. The instant he plunged into it the Vopos lost sight of him. Then it was a cabbage field.

The woods opened alarmingly onto a great flatland which was crisscrossed by sparse hedges and shallow drainage ditches. Breck didn't know what to do. He couldn't go straight ahead, into the open, nor could he turn back, for the Vopos were beating the scrub behind him. Then he became cognizant of the cabbage field off on his left.

He ran out toward the center of the field and threw himself flat on his stomach in the dirt. He had an idea that if he was seen from a distance his head would look like just another cabbage. And he was right.

In a little while the two Vopos broke from the woods and came to a halt in the slanting sun. Breck could see them pointing indecisively but couldn't hear their voice. Finally they split up and began to beat the hedges and scout the drainage ditches. As far as he could see they never once concerned themselves with the cabbage field itself. It was so obviously innocent in its open flatness.

He watched them for nearly an hour. Then they came together again, about one hundred yards

from his position, and from all appearances decided to give up the futile search. They cut an oblique course back to the canal.

Breck stayed where he was until the sun settled behind the woods. Then he stood up and turned toward the canal himself. He didn't really know what to do. He had no definite plan but instinct told him to stay with the water.

Walking now in the wine-dark twilight he suddenly realized just how desperately lonely he was for Colonel Luft's violent presence.

V

A LONG, BROAD, squatty sand barge was moored along the bank at a stone quay. Breck saw a solitary man on the cabin deck lighting his riding lamps. He was a burly, shirtless individual with a baggy yachtsman's cap on his head. On an impulse, Breck called to him.

"Going on to Berlin this evening?"

The man looked around, trying to distinguish Breck in the gloom. "What's it to you?"

"I'm looking for a passage."

"So? What kind of passage? Have you got papers?"

"No."

The bargeman snorted. "One of those, eh?" Then he cast a surreptitious look along the bank, and lowered his voice. "Come into the cabin. We'll talk about it."

The cabin was brightly lit and

remarkably dirty. There was a woman in there—a girl, actually, somewhere in that unguessable decade between twenty and thirty—sitting in a splintery wicker chair. She was pretty, but not beautiful because her mouth was too wide and her cheekbones too prominent.

She was, he thought, obviously careless with her short skirt and long bare legs, and she gave him what he could only describe as a sultry look. She made him feel uncomfortable.

"Take a walk," the burly man told her.

She stood up without a word and left the cabin. Breck cleared his throat and looked at the captain.

"What's your name?" the bargeman asked.

Breck gave the German equivalent of Smith, and the bargeman snorted again. "Another richard refugee, eh? What makes you think I'd risk my ticket and a prison sentence to smuggle you in?"

"Well, I thought that with perhaps enough money—"

"Put a name to it."

Breck named a sum. It was exactly half of the cash he had on him and it seemed a fairly substantial amount. The barge captain made a short harsh noise in his throat. He looked disgusted. He named a sum that was more than twice what Breck was carrying.

"No, I'm sorry," Breck murmured miserably. "I don't have it.

But if you could get me into Berlin, I have friends there who would—"

"*Nein, nein!* I've heard that talk before. Cash now, or nothing."

Breck shrugged hopelessly.

"Well—" He didn't know what else to say. The barge captain did. He said, "Get out of here. I can't waste time on your sort."

The girl was standing in the dark on the stern. Breck imagined that she had been listening at the door. She held up a warning hand, then beckoned him to follow her. His curiosity aroused, he did.

She led the way forward along the starboard gangway to a steel ladder, and preceded him down into the open cargo hold. There, in a pale dark niche between the forward bulkhead and the sloping dune of sand, she turned to him with a harsh whisper.

"He's a pig. For the right price he'd smuggle Lenin's body into West Berlin. And it's no job at all for him either. He has connections at all the control points. *Chantage*." She gave the French word for graft.

She was standing distractingly close to Breck. A breeze off the canal fluttered her hair and for a moment Breck went through a transition in time, returning to a younger period in his past—before marriage and children and the affairs of the troubled world. He had forgotten the peculiar perfume one always found in a girl's hair.

"Is he your husband?" he asked.

She made a short, almost furious, gesture with her hand. "What else can one do? Existence isn't easy here in the East. And when a girl has no family she either marries what she can or—"

She shrugged, and fell silent for an instant. Then she brushed back her hair and asked:

"How much money do you have? The price you offered him won't do at all."

He told her, not knowing what to expect but reduced by now to the desperate point of clutching at nearly any straw.

"Give it to me," she said. "I'll get you through."

"Well—that's extremely good of you. But how can you—"

"When we reach the checkpoint he will be up in the wheelhouse with the *Volkspolizei* checking the manifest. Only one Vopo will snoop around the decks. I know all of them. I'll take care of him."

"You mean this Vopo will know about me but he'll still let you go ahead and smuggle me into Berlin?"

"Of course he won't know about you," she said. "He won't even see you. I'll put you down in the focul and you'll stay out of sight in the latrine. When the Vopo goes down to check the compartment I'll go with him and give him this money not to look any further. He'll be satisfied. He'll think I'm running contraband tobacco or soap. That's

all there is to it. My husband won't know a thing about it."

Breck was at a loss. "I—I don't know how I can thank you for—"

She came even closer to him, her face tilted up to his, soft in the starlight. "Don't say anything," she whispered.

He had the feeling that she was waiting for him to kiss her, wanted him to. Perhaps it was because of the swinish bargeman she had to live with, and because of the lonely life she led on the dreary canal in this melancholy land. And so he did, but not as he would have before marriage and children and the affairs of the troubled world—doing it quickly, awkwardly, and with self-conscious embarrassment.

"Remember me sometime when you are free," she whispered.

"Yes," he murmured. "Yes."

Then she squeezed his hand and led him to a small metal door, saying, "Down there. I'll be back."

She left him in darkness, yet something of her lingered behind—the perfume of her hair, the haunting memory of her tactile body and mouth. He turned in a bemused mood and went down the steps into the black compartment. He seemed to be out of touch with reality. He had stumbled into the time-lag of the past again, and—oddly enough—his thoughts had no room for his far-away wife and nearly-grown daughters.

The metal floor under his feet

started to vibrate and he knew that the barge was under way.

The vibration paused, then resumed as the engine went astern, paused again, then picked up to capture a steady, rhythmical tone as the engine went ahead. Next stop Havel checkpoint, then West Berlin.

He came out of his reverie and felt his pockets for cigarettes. Then he attempted to concentrate on the touchstones of his life—the Conference, his work, his home, his family. But his mind played tricks on him. He saw the silencer spitting behind the newspaper, the men crumpling together, the appalling struggle to get the bleeding corpse into the portmanteau, the portmanteau dripping in the bus, the pistol in Crane's hand, the syringe in Luft's hand, the cabbages all around, the girl pressing up against him in the dark . . .

He stood up with a sigh. He was beginning to find the compartment oppressive. His nerves were shot, badly shot. He was ready to start climbing the grimy metal walls he couldn't see. He went up on the cargo deck and stood in the shadows, watching the canal slide by.

He heard the clunk of a metal door closing aft and he turned, seeing the blocky silhouette of the barge captain up in his wheelhouse, then seeing the slim shape of the girl on the cabin deck. A bright little ball of flame popped in her hand and she held it to her face to

light a cigarette. She stood there, black against the silvery canal, and smoked at the rail.

He started walking aft, staying safely in the heavy shadows of the cargo well. But he wasn't quick enough. With an abrupt flick of sparking cigarette she turned from the rail and went up the ladder to the bridge. Even though Breck was close he didn't dare call out. Some of the windows, he noticed, were open in the wheelhouse.

He stopped undecidedly, wondering if she would return and presently he heard the bargeman's voice overhead and the girl answering him.

"Are you going to turn him over to the Soviet garrison at Potsdam or wait till you reach the checkpoint?"

Breck stalled, his mind swinging into focus as he heard the man's reply.

"The garrison. I can get more for him from the *Genosse* there. And I'll tell you, Berthe, I think we have a real hot one this time. This man isn't just some common refugee trying to run the barricade. Hell, he isn't even German—not with that accent."

Genosse, Beck thought numbly. Comrade.

The girl had said something which Breck missed. He heard the man say: "No. You'll go keep him entertained in the focsul and I'll fetch them. You can do that, can't you? Entertain him, I mean?"



"Oh yes, he'll entertain easily enough. I've already got him stirred into knots. But I don't like it. It isn't—"

"I'm not asking you to like it. This is business."

Breck started walking forward. He felt very sick. Far ahead he could see the night glitter of Potsdam. He found himself facing the steel ladder and he went up it to the gangway, and he stalled again, staring down at the sliding black water alongside.

He stood there like a somnambulist against a wall, immobilized by the treacherous calm he felt himself caught in. A neat little act—the man playing the surly villain, and the girl pretending to come to his aid. It had placed him completely in her power. How blind could a man be?

A door closed and he came

around with a start. Then he sat down and started removing his shoes. He knotted right lace to left and hung the shoes around his neck.

The girl was coming forward along the gangway. When she saw him sitting there on the edge with his shoes off she guessed. She stopped, looked at him, then said simply, "You heard."

Breck nodded. "I saw you by the cabin and I went back to talk to you. But you'd already gone up to your husband. So I stayed and I heard."

"He isn't my husband."

"That's your business."

"That's right, it's my business. All of it. The good and bad, the dirty and clean. Because we've got to live. I've got to live. But—I'm sorry, nevertheless. I really am sorry."

Breck allowed himself a sneer. "I don't doubt it. I understand Judas also had his regrets."

"You have no right to judge me!" She was furious. "You don't live here! You're not a part of this country. At your home there's butter on the table, isn't there? And sugar? And soap in the bathroom? Here half of us don't even have the bathroom. And what do you think happens to us in the winter when the canals freeze? We're out of business! We go hungry. We live from hand to mouth."

"Yes, I would have helped him to sell you to them. Because it's

what he wants. Because without him I have nothing, am nothing. Don't you think there are plenty of girls waiting to take my place on this barge? Do you know where I was, *what* I was before he took me in? Answer me! Do you know? Do you even care?"

Breck nodded. Yes, now he knew. And now he knew that she was right and that he had no right to pass judgement on her. To see the contrast between East and West Germany, he had told Luft. And he was seeing it, bit by bit. Where things are not what they seem, Luft had said.

"I'm sorry," he said quietly. "I—" He shrugged, and started to turn away.

"Wait. Listen. It isn't true that all the East German fences are electrically wired. They want you to think that so you won't try to jump them. But there are many places where you can get through. Go to the south end of the Gatow airstrip. The fence there is safe."

He stared up at her, trying to see her dark face. "You aren't going to try to stop me?" he wondered. "You're not going to cry out?"

She looked down at him for a long moment. Then she turned and walked slowly and quietly back along the sloping gangway, her head down.

Breck watched her go. "Thanks," he called softly.

Then he went over the side and into the cold ink-black water.

VI

IT TOOK John Breck all night and four of the dark morning hours to cross from the canal to the Havel River. He stayed in the fields and woods and little used bypaths, and by four AM—damp, hungry, and dead tired—his blistered and stone-bruised feet felt like walking fire.

The woods stopped short and a strip of clearing with a dirt path ran away to north and south. So did a fence, a very formidable fence.

Wearily he halted and crouched down in the wet weeds. He studied the fence. It was ten foot tall and it was barbed wire—not just parallel strands stretched between the iron stanchions but vertical ones as well, closely webbed. So there was no possibility of slipping between the strands the way a picnicker or a fisherman would trespass a farmer's meadow.

He rose and stepped across the path to read a sign on one of the posts in the moonlight—*You Are Now in the Free East German Democratic Republic. Permission to Pass Beyond This Point is Strictly Forbidden!*

If he hadn't been so tired and desperate he would have laughed at the irony of the words *Free* and *Forbidden* in the same statement.

To climb the fence by way of a stanchion, he quickly saw, would be impossible. The strands were

not fastened securely to the posts but simply wrapped around. They would give and slip under the pressure of a foot. Worse—there was a primitive arrangement of rusty tin cans hanging in clusters from the wire. He had no doubt that if the cans were disturbed they would create a guard-alerting clamor.

A small halo of light was bobbing along the south path on Breck's side of the fence. The flashlight of an approaching guard undoubtedly. He hurried back into the weeds and threw himself prone.

The dancing beam of light came closer, closer, and then Breck saw the Vopo—a hulking youth with a slung burp gun. He stopped and lit a cigarette and stood smoking complacently in his island of torch-light.

Presently another light approached from the north. It was on the opposite side of the fence and a West Berlin policeman stepped up to the wire to greet the Vopo with hollow joviality.

"Guten Abend, Genosse."

"Don't 'comrade' me, you capitalist's lackey."

"Listen to me, bolshevik. Are you ready to confess yet where you have hidden Stalin's body?"

"Nein. But are you prepared to admit now that you were Hitler's latrine orderly?"

"Nein."

Then they both chuckled.

Obviously they were friendly enemies. But as far as Breck was

concerned one was his friend and one his enemy. It was maddening to have to lie there in the weeds of East Germany and look at the West Berliner standing on a patch of freedom only twenty-five feet away. He had an insane compulsion to cry out to the man for help.

"Well, tell me. How many old women refugees have you machine-gunned away from the fence tonight, my Khrushchevistic loony?"

"About as many disease-carrying fugitives as you have helped over the wire tonight, my Christian cuckoo!"

They laughed again and parted, the two lights moving away from each other in opposite directions. Breck watched the one on the West side of the fence go with a sick heart. Then he was alone again.

He left the weeds and returned to the fence. One thing he'd noticed in the torchlight—an embankment of stones had been erected along the foot of the fence to form a rock sill. Now, squatting in the pathway, he began fumbling in the dark, removing the stones hurriedly, throwing each one of them into the weeds behind him.

It was rough work on the hands. But he didn't care if he tore them to shreds. He was going to get across. He didn't care if he had to kill or be killed to do it. He had become obsessed with reaching West Berlin. It seemed as though his entire life had been building up

to this one moment. Forty-six years of freedom. Then—suddenly, shockingly—twenty hours without it. He couldn't stand it. He had to get back the thing he had lost. It was too precious to be without.

Now he had cleared a sizeable breach—at least in breadth but not in height. Carefully he took the bottom strand in his hand and tried to raise it. Off to his left a cluster of tin cans rattled warningly. All right, then. *Dig!*

He started digging, both hands going it like a penned dog determined to escape. His single-mindedness of purpose blinded, deafened him to everything else. He was wholly concentrated on his hole.

Then something caught in the corner of his eye and his head snapped up and around. The flashlight danced brightly in the distance. The Vopo was returning.

For a moment Breck went wild. He threw himself down and tried to squirm under the wire, instantly catching the bridge of his nose on the bottom strand. He jerked back with a burning barb of pain, his eyes turning to stinging liquid. He could probably make it if he only had the time to struggle and squirm and claw his way under. But he didn't have the time. The light was close, very close.

Frantically he sprang up and bounded back into the weeds, his left foot landing on and rolling off of one of the stones he'd pitched

there, and his ankle turned and he went down all at once in a clump.

The Vopo stalked heavily down the path, the light of his torch swinging left-right, left-right, across the dirt from weeds to stones. Fascinated, Breck watched the light approach the spot where he had dug his escape hole. Left-right, left—

The light stopped. So did the Vopo. "*Was ist?*" he muttered. He jabbed the blade of light at the breach in the embankment. Then he straightened and shot the light through the fence, cutting up the night.

Turning, he stooped and studied the footprints in the path. Not satisfied with that he ran the light into the weeds and immediately he spotted the trampled track Breck had made the first time he'd had to rush into the weeds to hide. The Vopo unslung his burp gun and snicked off the safety and started into the weeds cautiously.

Watching him, his head down on his forearms, Breck felt apprehension flood through him like a violent wash of sickness. If he jumped and tried to run he would go down under the withering stutter of the machine gun. If he did nothing, remained waiting where he was, he would be found, captured, and taken to the barracks. The officer in charge would know about him.

The Vopo had now discovered the mashed-down place where Breck had first hidden. He washed



the weedy area with torchlight. Breck raised his head. There was a round black knob right in front of him. He reached for it, took the ball-shaped stone in his hand, and gave it an evaluating heft. About five pounds!

He came to his knees, cocking his right hand with the stone over his shoulder and let it fly. It went *thop!* in the Vopo's back and the man jerked upright and lost his equilibrium and went straight down to his knees, his hand reflexing and the burp gun ripping at the black woods.

Breck went for him in a pell-mell rush, his right arm automatically copying Luft's judo style, sweeping swordwise and bouncing the edge of his hand off the back of the stunned Vopo's neck, and not satisfied with that but grabbing the

man before he could pitch forward.

He started to throttle him, shouting: "You can't stop me! God damn you, I tell you you can't stop me! I'm crossing over! You hear me!"

He shoved the Vopo away, not caring whether the limp man was dead or not because he'd learned by now that there could be no pity in Luft's darkly glittered world. There were only two sides—those who wanted freedom, and those who tried to stop them from having it. So you killed or they killed you. It was all very elemental, really.

He picked up the burp gun and slung it high and far over the fence, and then he went after it, getting down on all fours and then on his back and wiggling and heel-kicking and shoving up at the barbed-grabbing bottom wire until he was through.

Far down the path he saw the West Berlin policeman's torch coming toward him at a bobbling run. Then he relaxed. He started walking to meet the man, the friend.

VII

IT WAS THE third day of the Conference and it was going very badly. Anyone could see that it was slanted for failure, but it was also quite obvious that the Communist delegates were doing the slanting. John S. Breck was thor-

oughly enjoying his part in the proceedings. His conscience was clean and he was definitely holding his own on each and every disputed point against his opposite number on the other side of the Conference table—a gentleman named Kornilov.

During disquiet moments of spite Breck would frequently find Kornilov studying him with an admixture of grudging respect and belligerent curiosity, and he came to assume that Kornilov had known all along of the kidnap plot that had been set for him.

What Kornilov didn't know, of course, was how Breck had managed to elude the Reds. Nor would he ever know, because it was still a very hush-hush affair and neither the Communists or Breck could admit that they knew anything about it.

Kornilov was waxing heavily on some obscure minor point when the corridor door opened and an MP on duty entered the Conference room and came quietly around the table to Breck's elbow.

"One of the messenger boys has a special delivery for you, sir," he whispered.

Breck nodded absently, trying to follow Kornilov's verbal and glaringly devious pattern of reasoning.

"All right. Send him in with it, please . . . I'm extremely sorry Mr. Kornilov, what was that again?"

Kornilov was a short, swarthy

man with a face as barren of humor as the Steppes were of timber. He frowned impatiently, saying: "I was merely stating that if you thought for a moment that we would bend on our stand concerning the Trinton Agreement, you would be making a great mistake. The economic measures provided for—"

Kornilov was suddenly aware of the fact that Breck was not paying the slightest bit of attention to him. Breck, in fact, looked as though he had been confronted by a ghost.

The messenger boy was entering with a huge unwieldy portmanteau.

No, Breck thought emptily. *My God no.*

But there was no evading it. The idiot boy was lugging the monster right to Breck's doorstep. A low titter of amusement rippled through the spectator's gallery, and the delegates too were turning in their seats with curious smiles. The messenger set the bag at Breck's feet.

Breck stared bleakly at the engraved letters on the top. JOHN S. BRECK. A grinning delegate from Interlaken spoke down the table.

"What is it, Mr. Breck? A guilty secret catching up to you?"

Everyone chuckled goodnaturedly—except Breck and Kornilov. The Russian, Breck noticed, was regarding him with rapt speculation. *Did he arrange to have this planted here?* Breck wondered.

Just an unexpected little slap to throw me off base?

"Sir," the messenger murmured, "there is a note."

Warily Breck accepted an envelope from the messenger and opened it.

My Dear Mr. Breck,

The unpleasant article which soiled your bag has been carefully removed and disposed of. I have taken the liberty of having the bag cleaned. You will find the cleaning bill inside.

Sincerely,

E. SARAFINO PEDRONI

"Pedroni?" Breck muttered blankly.

The messenger made a discreet gesture toward the gallery. "Mr. Pedroni is in the spectator's gallery, sir. The bald gentleman—third row on the left."

Breck looked up and saw Colonel Luft smiling his cherub's smile down on him like a bland benediction. Carefully Breck refolded the note and tucked it away in his pocket.

"Please tell Mr. Pedroni that Mr. Smith would like to buy him a drink when this business terminates," he instructed the messenger.

Then he swung back to the table with a patronizing smile. "You were saying, Mr. Kornilov?"



FOR OLD CRIMES SAKE

*He'd been framed for a murder he
badn't committed . . . and proving his
innocence might lay him in his grave.*

by DAY KEENE

THE TROUBLE IN Fawnskin happened on a Friday night. The tourist season had officially closed two weeks before, and the slot machines had hijacked their last dime, quarter and half dollar coins for another year. Prices were reluctantly returning to normal. The gift shops and the dance pavilion had been boarded up. A cold, gray rain was driving from the North with prospects of more to come.

Only a few dickheads stayed on at the Inn. Among them were the red-faced, flashily dressed man and the chain-smoking blonde who was registered as his wife. Their name, according to the register, was Smith. They had been in Fawnskin for a month, although why such a couple should have chosen such a small, out-of-the-way, mountain resort had been a thirty-day wonder.

Both man and woman would have been much more at home in Las Vegas or lolling on the sands in Miami Beach.

They were liberally supplied with money. She had the usual wedding and engagement ring. Smith wore a diamond the size of a dime on his right hand. He was reputed to be a racetrack tout, a gambler, the owner of a chain of movie theatres, a gunman hiding from the law.

The seed of what was to mature was planted shortly after two o'clock on Friday afternoon. At that time, acting under orders, Clyde Barrows, the youthful good-looking desk clerk, was checking the condition of the shutter on the windows of all rooms in the Inn, preparatory to its being closed for the winter.

Barrows' story was that he knocked on the door of the Smith suite, and got no response. Assuming the Smiths were both in the bar as usual, he had opened the door with his pass key and was examining the shutters when Mrs. Smith stepped out of the bathroom in an extremely embarrassing state of nudity. Apologizing as best he could, he had left the suite immediately.

On this point their stories varied greatly.

The known facts of the case were these. A few minutes after two, still barefooted, stopping only to snatch up a negligee that revealed as much as it concealed, and trailing an aroma of gin, the blonde stormed into the bar and up to Smith insisting he, "Beat the hell out of that smooth-mannered English desk clerk who has been behaving in a disrespectful way toward me ever since we made the mistake of coming here."

Her story continued that using his pass key, Barrows had entered their suite and finding her alone tried to force his attentions on her.

It was all very sordid and unpleasant. Smith, followed by his wife, stormed into Mack Ogilvey's office and raised hell. Ogilvey, the manager and owner of the Inn, sent for the desk clerk. Barrows no sooner entered the office than Smith leaped from his chair and punched him in the face.

Barrows, taken by surprise,

fought back, and before Ogilvey, Connie the barman, and Sally Dale, one of the dining-room waitresses, could separate them, considerable damage had been done on both sides.

Almost hysterical now, also slightly high, the blonde screamed her story again. Barrows promptly denied it and gave his version of the affair which was as promptly labeled "a damn lie" by Smith who demanded that Barrows be fired instantly.

Ogilvey had little or no choice. An inn lives on the good will of its patrons. It was Barrows' first season at the Inn. He had arrived in Fawnskin that spring and had promptly been lionized by Mary Fields and the local social set because he looked so distinguished, spoke with an Oxford drawl, and his once expensive but battered luggage was labeled with foreign hotel stickers.

The swank set as promptly dropped him when it learned that he had no money and had applied for and accepted the position of desk clerk at the Inn. Still in his middle twenties, he ate his meals at the Inn and slept in a box of a cabin in the woods built by some long dead miner. He seldom associated with the other employees.

Barrows was known to be close regarding money, never spending a penny he didn't have to. His only near intimate was Sally Dale.

She liked him, and insisted he wasn't snooty—just shy.

Mack Ogilvey paid off Barrows and fired him on the spot. But he also requested that the Smiths leave, giving the truth as his excuse, that he intended closing the Inn for the season.

And that was all right with Smith. At six o'clock that evening he ordered his big car sent around, had their luggage brought to the lobby, and paid their bill from the same large wad of cash he had displayed in the office.

They left shortly before seven in a cold, gray, blinding rain that at times completely obscured the tortuous mountain road. Of such was the warp and woof of murder. The blonde, dripping blood from a nasty head wound, was to stagger into Sheriff Matthew Dale's office some hours later. But Smith was never seen alive again.

The storm increased with the hour. Nine o'clock found the rain falling in torrents. It also found Sheriff Matt Dale standing in the doorway of his office beating time with his peg-leg to the dance band on his radio while he drank in the storm.

If there was murder in the air he failed to smell it. The pelt of the rain on the roof sounded good. He was glad the season was over. He liked people to have a good time. He liked to have a good time himself. He saw nothing wrong in making love to a girl, having a few

drinks, or playing a friendly hand of poker.

But some of the summer people carried the thing too far, like the couple Sally had told him about at supper.

He doubted that Clyde Barrows had acted as the woman had claimed. Dale knew the clerk slightly and liked him. He wondered what he would do now that his job was gone. Drift most likely to Sacramento or San Francisco. Fawnskin had few jobs out of season.

Across the way Jim Hurber, owner of the town's only filling station, locked his gas pumps for the night and waving as he passed the sheriff's office chugged down the rainswept hill in his battered station wagon. The lights in the *Elite* and the *Palace* cafes winked out. Mary Fields and a car filled with laughing young people, driving too fast, sloshed by on their way to the last dance of the season at the country club and Matt Dale knew a moment of resentment.

Sally was every bit as pretty as Mary Fields. She should be going to the dance wearing the new formal she had purchased so hopefully. But he and Sally just didn't belong.

He was only a county Sheriff and Sally waited table at the Inn. It was Sheriff Dale this and Sheriff Dale that when the upper crust of Fawnskin wanted something from him. But at all other times he was just

Peg Dale a former ranchhand buckaroo and bronc buster who had been foolish enough to get in the way of an enemy mortar shell in Korea.

It was the country folks and ranchers who had elected him, the elite of Fawnskin insisting a one-legged man wasn't capable of being sheriff. But Matthew Dale had confounded his critics. He had proven in the two years he had been sheriff that a determined man could move faster and cover more ground on one sound and one peg-leg than most men could on two sound limbs.

Now, yawning, unaware a by-product of murder was chugging back up the hill in Jim Hurber's old car, he wished Sally would return from consoling Clyde Barrows so he could lock up and go home. Almost as he wished it a car materialized through the rain and Sally, parking in front of the office, rolled down the window and cried out to him.

"Clyde isn't at his cabin. You haven't seen him in town, have you?"

Dale said he had not and rain glistening on her curls, Sally joined him in the office. "I'm worried," she said. "No one has seen him since that thing happened this afternoon. And he felt like hell about losing his job."

Getting into his slicker, the sheriff shrugged. "So he lost his



job, if not here in Fawnskin then in Sacramento or Frisco."

"That," his sister admitted frankly, "is just what I'm afraid of. Can't you get it through your thick head that I have designs on him?"

He grinned. "There's to be an Englishman in the family, eh?"

"If I have anything to do with it," she said.

And then it happened. The rain stopped abruptly as if on cue. Jim Hurber's battered car slithered up to the office and sobbing hysterically, her expensive traveling suit sodden with rain, her fingers stripped of her rings, clotted blood staining her hair, Mrs. Smith staggered into the office and sank into a chair.

Jim Hurber, who had followed her in, told Dale, "I picked her up like that about two miles out of town, Sheriff. There was no sign of her husband and she's been crying too hard to tell me what happened. Must have been an accident or something. They stopped for gas before they started down the hill and he was that high I says to myself, 'He'll never make it on a night like this.'"

Words began to grope their way through the blonde's hysterical sobbing. "It—wasn't an accident. He stopped us at the bridge. There was a barricade and he was waiting with a gun."

Sheriff Dale and Hurber looked at each other. There was only one bridge on the road. It wasn't properly a bridge. It was a storm culvert about six miles out of town.

The blonde continued, sobbing, "I walked and walked and walked but no one came along. It was dark in the woods, and wet."

Sheriff Dale knelt beside her. "Look, lady,—"

"Her name is Smith," his sister broke in.

Dale tried again. "Look, Mrs. Smith. Get ahold of yourself if you can. If something has happened to your husband the sooner you tell me about it the sooner I can help him. My name is Matt Dale. I'm the sheriff."

She wailed, hysterically, "John's dead. He shot him and put him in a car."

Dale asked Hurber to hand him the bottle of whiskey in the right hand drawer of his desk and poured a water tumbler half full. The blonde gulped it gratefully. Then, somewhat more composed, she told her story.

Because of the storm her husband had driven slowly. Some miles out of town the headlights had picked up a road barricade their side of a small bridge. Assuming the bridge had washed out, her husband had stopped his car and was rolling down the window in an attempt to see if the shoulder was hard enough to turn around on when a man appeared out of the rain, yanked the car door open, shot her husband twice through the head and slugged her with the barrel of the gun.

Half conscious she felt her rings being stripped from her fingers, saw her husband's body loaded into another car. Then the man had returned for her. Only terror had given her sufficient strength to tear herself free and run blindly into the woods. He had searched for her for what seemed like hours. Then, hearing his car drive away, she had stumbled up the road toward Fawnskin the point where Hurber had picked her up.

Her lips dry, Sally asked her, "And this man who shot your husband? You recognized him?"

The blonde held out the glass for more whiskey. "I certainly did. He was that nasty little English

desk clerk who broke into my room this afternoon."

II

CLYDE BARROWS was cold. He was wet. The air was close and stale. His mouth felt furred. He was lying on his back on something soft but every muscle in his body ached. He reached out in the dark and his groping fingers encountered smooth cold glass and metal.

He sat up in terror, smacked his head smartly against the steering wheel of his coupe and realized where he was. But how he had got there was an entirely different matter. He shouldn't be in his car. He should be in his cabin writing a note to Sally Dale.

The pain of the blow clearing his head slightly he rolled down the window by the wheel and sucked in great lungfuls of wet air. His car was parked in an unfamiliar clearing. Great pines rose sheer on every side. The drumming of the rain on the roof of the car was deafening. He hadn't the least idea where he was. He wished he had a drink, or perhaps a spot of tea.

Tea. That was it. After the scene at the hotel he had gone to the cabin to make a cup of tea and write a note to Sally, asking her to wait, telling her all the things he was too shy to tell her in person. He had intended to begin it, "Dearest Sally." He remembered wondering if she might consider the

salutation too familiar. Then—then what had happened?

He remembered putting a kettle to boil and dropping a tea bag in a cup. His tea made, he had drunk it and opened his traveling bag to get his stationery. And that was the last he remembered.

Now he was in his car parked in the rain in an unfamiliar clearing. He felt the lips that Mr. Smith had punched. They were still tender to the touch. A ghastly affair, the whole of it. It simply failed to make sense. Smith was a bounder, and his wife had lied from first to last. Still, he didn't blame Mr. Ogilvey. There had been little else the Inn owner could have done.

If only he knew where he was now and how he had come there. He stepped out into the rain and the cold downpour cleared the last of the fog from his head. He recognized the clearing vaguely as one in which he and Sally Dale had often parked. If that was true, he was below Fawnskin on a side road leading back into the mountains. The main highway was half a mile distant. The thing for him to do was to drive back to his cabin and the Inn and find out what had happened.

He got back into the car and noted with surprise that his luggage was neatly stacked on the ledge behind the seat. He was obviously packed and ready to leave. He could write Sally from San Francisco. He consulted his watch and



saw it was after ten. He returned the watch to his pocket with fingers that shook slightly.

It had been approximately two-thirty when Mr. Ogilvey had discharged him and paid him off. It couldn't have been later than three when he had reached his cabin. Now it was after ten. He had seven unexplained hours to account for!

A familiar smell in the car intrigued him. He traced it to the web of his right hand. He had fired a faulty gun, and recently. There was an unmistakable smell of spent powder and flecks of powder were still embedded in the flesh of his hand.

Clyde Barrows forced himself to remain calm. Fate seemed to be playing strange tricks on him, but he'd be damned if he'd let fear prevent him from trying to find out

what happened in a cool, methodical way, as if it were simply an annoying problem that a stubborn kind of persistence would enable him to solve.

He opened the traveling bag he didn't remember packing and felt under his shirts for his service .455 Webley. The Webley was gone but a cheap, nicked gun, that well might be faulty, had replaced it. Barrows sniffed expertly at the barrel. The cylinder was filled but the gun had been fired recently, within the last hour, at a rough guess.

Puzzled, Clyde Barrows started his car and drove the half mile to the highway. About to turn uphill to Fawnskin he braked abruptly as a huge, coarse-featured man wearing a black-and-white striped shirt and a crumpled brown beret, his face contorted with anger, stepped into the beam of his headlights and waved him down.

"Non, non, monsieur," he said in excited French. "It is not permit you return." Then, as if suddenly realizing he had said too much, he fumbled a heavy automatic from the pocket of his slicker and pantomimed to Barrows to turn his car around. "Avant!"

"Now," Barrows thought, "I know I'm mad. I've ripped my top."

The man looked like a weather-beaten sailor from some southern European port. But what was a beret-wearing Frenchman doing in the mountains of California?

Angered because he didn't turn the car as ordered, the big man poked the automatic into the open car window and again pantomimed for him to turn the car around. "Avant, mon ami!"

"You're a little mixed-up," Barrows said, "I'm not your friend and you must just *think* you know me. A mistake like that could be serious—for you."

He attempted to brush the gun aside and it exploded in his face, the heavy slugs smashing the glass out of the other window of the car. Then, cursing Clyde Barrows savagely in French the other man who, for some reason, seemed hesitant to shoot, dragged the former hotel clerk from his car and slugged him brutally about the head.

It wasn't a game. It wasn't a stick-up job. Whatever was behind it, this thing was for keeps. Groggy from the blows, Barrows retaliated by scraping one heel down the big man's shin then, whirling, snapped the side of his hand to his throat with sufficient force to stagger him and send the gun spinning from his hand.

Following through, Barrows smashed a hard left to the pit of his assailant's stomach to double him into position, then rapped him smartly just over the kidneys.

He didn't like dirty fighting. But one didn't last long in a kill or be-killed struggle without knowing all of the tricks. Writhing and moaning with pain the big man sank to

the side of the road and Barrows reached into the car for the cheap nickled, revolver.

It was a mistake on his part. When he turned back again the man who had attacked him was gone—vanished into the rain and the night as if by magic. There was no sound but the pelt of the rain and the gush of the accumulated water as it rushed down the road.

Panting slightly as he leaned against his car it was difficult to make the scene come alive again, difficult not to believe he had imagined the attack. When he remembered to look for it even the automatic was gone and the rain had obliterated its outline from the mud where it had lain.

Getting back in his car he drove on slowly toward Fawnskin. The attack didn't make sense. The whole day hadn't made sense, starting from the moment the lying, hysterical blonde he hadn't so much as touched had accused him of assaulting her.

Despite the hour and the pouring rain the walk and street outside of Sally's brother's office was black with grim-faced men in slickers, and with girls and women in brightly colored raincoats. Dozens of cars were parked at the curb. Through the brightly lighted window Clyde Barrows could see Sheriff Dale passing out rifles and shotguns. Decidedly something had happened.

Barrows wondered if the big

Frenchman had attacked some other car, then thought of his own lost hours, the cheap revolver, and the powder flecks on his hand and winced. But whatever he'd done, if he had done anything, he'd have to face it. The only sensible thing for him to do was talk to Sheriff Dale and tell him the whole story.

He drove on past the office unnoticed, swung the car in a wide U-turn and drove on back again in search of a place to park, only to have an armed man in glistening slicker peer in the shattered window of the car, level a rifle on him and order him to stop.

"By God!" the man swore. "Going to pull right on through town, were you?" He raised his voice in an exultant shout. "Hey, fellows. Here he is. I've got Clyde Barrows. I'm holding a gun on him."

A dozen men surrounded Barrows' car immediately, rifles bristling in their hands. "Come on. Get out of there, you dirty killer," Jim Hurber cried. "I gave you credit for better sense. I thought you'd be holed-up in the hills or half way to Frisco by now."

Eager hands dragged Barrows from the car. He attempted to speak and a dozen fists pummeled him silent. He started to fight back, thought better of it.

Dale's peg thumping solidly as he crossed the office, the Sheriff ordered the men holding Barrows to release him and stand back. "A sheriff's posse was just about to

start out after you," he said coldly. "What's the matter, Barrows? Why did you come back? Forget something?"

"No," Barrows said. He hesitated briefly, added, "I don't suppose you'll believe this. But I don't know what the commotion is all about or what I'm supposed to have done."

Jim Hurber snapped, "I'll bet you don't."

Ignoring him, Barrows continued, "You see, upon my word of honor, until I came to in a clearing a few miles down the road a short half hour ago, the last thing I remember was making and drinking a cup of tea shortly after Mr. Ogilvey discharged me."

"Now," Hurber said, "I've heard it all."

Color creeping into his cheeks, Barrows went on, "I started for this office immediately but at the juncture with the highway I was set upon by a big man in a striped shirt who tried to make me turn back at the point of a gun. He spoke French, and didn't look like—well, anyone you'd expect to meet in the vicinity of Fawnskin. He was wearing a beret and looked like a seaman. That's the impression I got, anyway. He ordered me not to return to Fawnskin and I was forced to grapple with him and take his gun way." Barrows' story sounded thin and fantastic even to himself.

Sheriff Dale said dryly, "That's as good a yarn as any, I suppose,

of those cheap mail order things. There should be a law against them."

Manston asked if he should open the bag. Sheriff Dale said he would do it. Barrows wondered what they were searching for. Then Sheriff Dale stood up again, a thick, flat wad of money in his hands. "Would you say this was your husband's money, Mrs. Smith?"

She said it looked like her husband's money. "If it is," she added tearfully, "there should be two thousand eight hundred and fifty dollars, because that's what John told me we had left after he paid our bill."

A film of cold sweat on his forehead, Barrows watched Dale count the money.

Sheriff Dale counted it carefully. "Two thousand eight hundred and fifty dollars," he said when he concluded his count. Laying the money on his desk he turned back, scowling, to Barrows.

"Well, that seems to be it, Barrows. What did you do with the rings? What did you do with the Smith's body?" Dale accompanied the questions with a back hand slap. "Talk, damn you. Talk! We don't like killers in Fawnskin."

III

THE RAIN HAD ceased but here was a soft wet fragrance to the woods. A crescent moon was spikd on the topmost peak of tall

to try to explain away the cuts and contusions on your face. What really happened, Barrows? Wasn't Smith dead? Did he come to and put up a fight before you could dispose of the body?"

His mouth dry, his throat constricted, Barrows repeated the name Smith. It was Smith then who was dead, the same Smith with whom he had quarreled. He found himself instinctively rubbing his power-stained hand on his trouser. Then he saw the blonde. She was sitting back of the sheriff's desk, a blood-stained gauze turban around her head.

As he looked at her she leapt up with a scream of terror. Upsetting the chair in her panic she backed to the wall and pressed her palms flat against it. "Don't let him kill me like he killed John."

Barrows hadn't moved, but a dozen men sprang to hold him. A moment of ugly silence followed, the only sound the drumming of the rain. Then two of Sheriff Dale's temporary deputies, Lew Manston, the drugist, and Eric Reamer, the feed store man, stomped into the office, Manston carrying Barrows' labeled-covered bag, Reamer the nickled gun.

"Found it right on the seat," Reamer said. "He was evidently of a mind to shoot his way out if he was stopped. Then he must have lost his nerve." Handling the gun gingerly with his handkerchief he laid it on the sheriff's desk. "It's one

pine. With the floodlight on the Sheriff's car illuminating the highway and the rushing stream that gushed under the culvert the scene had an unreal postcard quality to it.

Sitting handcuffed to the wheel of Dale's car, Clyde Barrows thought, *This can't be happening to me.*

But it was. He had been formally charged with murder. Mrs. Smith had signed the complaint. Now Sheriff Matt Dale was taking the first of the many preliminary steps that would lead to his eventual trial and ultimate conviction.

The peg-legged sheriff was being scrupulously fair but Barrows had no doubt he would be convicted. Whether Smith's body was ever found or not, damaging circumstantial evidence was against him.

It was known he and Smith had quarreled. He had, perhaps, as some of the witnesses alleged, threatened to kill Smith during their exchange of blows. A man made such threats when he was angry. He had no alibi for the hours from three to ten. He couldn't tell a jury, "I drank a cup of tea and blacked out." What jury would believe that?

Sheriff Dale concluded his examination of the dead man's car and turned his attention to the barricade, now moved to the shoulder of the road. Barrows continued his mental review of the evidence against him.

Mrs. Smith's testimony would be the most damning. She would swear under oath that he was the man who shot her husband, slugged and attempted to attack her. A paraffin test had revealed powder specks on his hand. A gun had been found in his luggage. No one believed his wild story about the sailor in a striped shirt who had attempted to prevent him from returning to Fawnskin.

Sheriff Dale stumped back to the car. "Feel like talking yet?"

"I don't know what to say," Barrows told him truthfully.

"Can't think up another story like the one about the Frenchman who looked like a sailor?" said Jim Hurber. "Of all the rot I ever heard."

The night air was cool but Sheriff Dale removed his hat and wiped perspiration from his sweatband. It was his first murder case and he was feeling the responsibility. "There's plenty of blood back of the wheel of Smith's car," he told his deputies. "That backs up Mrs. Smith's story. But the rain has washed out any foot or tireprints and I doubt if the state fingerprint man can get anything off that barricade."

Manston wanted to know what more he wanted than the gun, the recovered money, and Mrs. Smith story.

"Smith's body, if we can find it," Sheriff Dale said curtly. "There have been two or three murder convictions lately without a corpus



delicti but juries shy away from voting the death penalty without one."

Dale replaced his hat. "Come on. While we're here let's search the underbrush on both sides of the road. He probably threw the body in an old mine shaft but what sticks me is the fact there's no blood in Barrow's car."

The group moved away. Searchlights began to gleam under the dripping trees. There was little or no underbrush and the scene took on an even more unreal aspect.

Sally Dale left the little group of women near the culvert and walked back to her brother's car. "I'm sure you didn't do it, Clyde," she said softly.

Barrows looked directly at Sally Dale. "I thought for a time perhaps

I might have. But now I am beginning to doubt it."

She stood, both hands on the ledge of the door, saying nothing, her eyes glistening in the dark. Suddenly her lips twitched and she turned away with a sob.

Barrows watched her moving off through the darkness, a wave of utter despair sweeping over him. "I hope she really believes me," he mumbled to himself.

He wondered suddenly if the man he'd grappled with on the road might not have murdered Smith—and as promptly dismissed the thought. As hysterical and frightened as she must have been, the dead man's widow couldn't make that big a mistake. Besides, she had identified him.

But the more he thought about it the angrier he became. He hadn't assaulted the blonde as she had claimed. Therefore the woman was a liar and having lied about one thing she well might be lying about the manner in which her husband had met his death.

More, a man didn't pass out on tea unless the tea had been drugged. It would have been a simple matter for someone to slip into his cabin and insert chloral in the top few tea bags in the canister. His British habits were well known. His fellow employees had ribbed him unmercifully all summer because whenever he felt the need of a lift he drank a spot of tea.

Seven lost hours and powder

stains on his hand or not, he was beginning to doubt he had killed anyone, certainly not with the cheap little gun it was alleged he had used when he had a perfectly good .455 Webley in his bag. How to prove it was another matter.

Once he was remanded to jail he would be helpless, entirely at the mercy of the law. His story was fantastic Sheriff Dale didn't believe it. He couldn't hire much of a lawyer, let alone investigators, with the three hundred dollars he had saved. And he was damned if he would cable his father in London.

His lean jaw set determinedly. A fine kettle of fish that would be after not writing or hearing from home in three years. He had gotten into this mess. He would damn well get out without help from his family.

His mind was alert and working now. The furry taste was gone from his mouth. He wanted suddenly to know a great number of things, among them if Smith had been insured and, if so, for how much.

Sheriff Dale wanted a body, did he? Well, he'd locate one for him. He sat perfecting his plans, drumming the fingers of his handcuffed hand on the wheel until the searchers, wet and weary, returned to the string of cars.

Sheriff Dale looked tired. His peg worked well enough on solid ground but the rain had made a quagmire of the woods. Unlocking Barrows from the wheel he told his deputies, "We'll take Barrows back

to the jail and *talk* to him awhile. It might just be a little *conversation* will make him more cooperative."

Barrows simulated fear. "You can't do that. It's against the law to use force in questioning a prisoner."

"Who said anything about using force?" Dale asked.

Still crying quietly, Sally got into the back seat of the car with Manston and Hurber as her brother's posse prepared to return to Fawnskin.

"You stop that and right now," Dale told her. "Barrows isn't worth wasting your tears on."

"But maybe Clyde's story is true," Sally said. "Maybe he didn't do it."

Reamer got into the front seat beside Sheriff Dale and Barrows. "Yeah. And maybe the sun won't rise tomorrow. You mind what your brother says. We found both a gun and the money on him, didn't we? And hasn't Mrs. Smith positively identified him as the man who shot her husband. What more do you want?"

"I'd still like Smith's body," Sheriff Dale insisted.

"And to find it you'll beat me the rest of the night," Barrows said.

"That could be," Dale admitted.

Barrows hesitated, then seemed to come to a decision. "What's the use of putting off the agony," he said abruptly. "I seem to have made a mess of things. If you will turn the car around and Sally will direct you

to the old mine shaft near which we once parked, I'll show you where the body is."

There was a startled gasp from Sally and the sheriff narrowed his eyes, and looked at Barrows searchingly. Then he seemed satisfied that what he had just heard was evidence enough by itself to send Barrows to the gas chamber and his expression changed to one of grim satisfaction.

His hand hesitating over his horn, he returned it to the wheel. "We'll let the rest of the crowd go on," he told the men in the car. "The four of us are enough to handle Barrows."

Hurber, Manston, and Reamer, agreed with him. Slowing down his speed, Dale allowed his car to drop back until the long cavalcade of cars that had followed them out of Fownskin rounded the next bend in the road. Then he asked his sister: "What shaft is that, Sally?"

"The old Murillo shaft," she said, stiffly.

Sheriff Dale made a sharp U-turn, drove back half a mile, then turned off on the side road where Barrows had encountered the huge, French-speaking man. As they neared the clearing it began to rain again.

"You stay in the car," Dale ordered Sally. Handcuffing Barrows to his left wrist he tugged him out into the rain. "No funny stuff," he warned him. "Now—where is the body, Barrows?"

Barrows turned to face the shaft, seemingly puzzled. "It's off to the right, I believe, under a large mound of pine needles."

"You believe him?" Hurber said sharply.

Barrows wiped the rain from his eyes with the back of his hand. "I was in a hurry and confused when I hid it."

Manston asked, "You certain you didn't push it back in the shaft?" As he spoke he picked up a piece of tailing and tossed it into the ancient prospect hole. A sharp hiss and an ugly rattling as of dry paper echoed the falling of the stone.

"No, I reckon not," Manston answered his own questions. "No cowardly killer is going to drag a dead man into a nest of rattlers."

Hurber threw a second rock after the first. "All these old shafts are the same. But at least a rattler gives his victim some warning. And that's more than this skunk did. He just opened the door and shot Smith through the head."

"We'll fan out," Sheriff Dale decided. "A large mound of needles shouldn't be too hard to spot even in this rain."

The five men, Barrows still handcuffed to Sheri Dale, moved forward slowly, their flashlights streaking on before them and reflecting off the wet trunks of the trees. The ground was wet. The needle-covered floor of the forest was slippery.

Barrows lagged purposely. Dale, his peg sinking deeply into the soft ground from time to time, found the going heavy. The gap between Hurber on their right and Manston and Reamer on their left widened steadily.

"You're sure now," Sheriff Dale asked suspiciously when they had been searching for five minutes, "that this is where you hid the body?"

"As positive as I am I killed him," the young Englishman said. It was now or never. He hated to do this thing to Sally's brother. He didn't know if he *could* do it. He wouldn't have a second chance.

"Over there," he said, pointing. "Isn't that a mound of needles?"

Dale turned to look and swinging his left fist like a club, Barrows struck him in back of the ear, then using his own body and handcuffed arm as a fulcrum, pivoted sharply and heaved. Dale landed heavily on his back, stunned momentarily as Barrows searched frantically for the key.

He found it in Dale's vest pocket and had just unlocked the handcuff when Dale returned to full consciousness with an outraged roar that stopped the distant lights in their tracks.

Then Barrows was on his feet and running, Matt Dale's gun in his hand and the Sheriff, bellowing behind him: "Barrows loose! He slugged me and got the key. Shoot him, one of you guys!"

Heavy calibered slugs began ricocheting between the trees, and then the fusillade stopped as suddenly as it had begun. The rain drowned out all sound—the flashlights wouldn't carry that far because there was nothing at which to shoot—and Sally Dale was back there somewhere.

Barrows found her standing beside the car, her eyes wide with anger. "You murderer," she cried. "If you've hurt my brother. I—"

Panting for breath, the running men close behind him, Barrows had no time to argue with her. Picking her up bodily he tossed her into the car, then slipped behind the wheel and stepped on the starter. He jack-rabbed the car in a skidding turn and roared back down the side-road to the highway, the running men holding their fire for fear of hitting Sally.

Sobbing now, she started tugging at him in an effort to interfere with his driving. "You coward—stop this car and let me out."

His mind on the slippery road he paid no attention to her except to push her away from time to time when she interfered with his vision. Reaching the highway he turned left on two wheels and hurtled the car down the winding mountain road.

What he wanted to know couldn't be learned in Fawnskin. He would have to go to the address in San Francisco from which the blonde and Smith had registered.

He remembered it distinctly. It was the Alhama Hotel.

IV

A FAINT MORNING sun was gilding the junction formed by Market, Kearny, Geary, and Third Streets, when Clyde Barrows parked the car a quarter of a block from the Alhama Hotel but fog almost immediately obscured both the sun and the hotel sign.

Her eyes swollen from crying, Sally Dale regarded him sullenly from the far side of the front seat. "Believe me now?" he asked her.

"I don't know," she said. "I don't know what to believe. If you didn't kill him why did you hit Matt and force me into that wild ride down the mountain?"

He explained—as he had explained a dozen times during the ride. "Because I hope to marry you some day. And I can't do it if I'm sent to the gas chamber for a murder I didn't commit. As you would put it, I think I was framed."

"But why?" Sally asked. "Why are you so important that anyone should want to frame you? What would they gain?"

"I don't know," Barrows admitted wearily. "The whole affair doesn't make sense. I'm not at all important. I'm not going to inherit any money and I've only three hundred dollars to my name."

"Which really isn't Barrows but Montgaden," Sally said. "You just

weren't careful enough about removing all of the identification from your luggage."

Barrows said quietly, "I see! You know then—have known all along. But I've a right to use the name of Barrows, Sally. It was my mother's name."

"But why don't you use your right name?" she persisted. "Are you ashamed of it?"

Barrows tightened his lips without replying, and peered through the light fog to where a young traffic officer was preparing to take up his duties for the day.

"Let's decide this right now," he said. "I am gambling on borrowed time. Either you believe me or you don't. If you don't, there is an officer. Why don't you call to him and turn me in."

Sally said, "I want to believe you, Clyde."

"Then let's get on with it," he said. "I want to talk to the clerk at the Alhama. I want to know how the Smiths got on and what he did for a living. The only possible solution I can see is that Mrs. Smith has a lover, they wanted Smith out of the way and they picked me for the scapegoat because I was handy. Her claim I attempted to assault her would seem to point to that."

Sally allowed him to help her from the car. He locked it and threw the keys in a convenient trash can. It had served its purpose. The first officer to spot the license plate would turn it in and the hunt

would be on for him in San Francisco.

As they walked toward the hotel he saw, or thought he saw the officer on the corner glance toward the parked car.

The Alhama was small and flashy, the type of a hotel in which the Smiths would live. It was small wonder they had been bored at the Inn. The business heart of San Francisco, the night-clubs, the theatres, and the famous restaurants, were all within walking distance of the hotel.

The lobby was tiled and smelled of soap and disinfectant. A porter was rearranging the chairs, and the sofas and potted palms. A room refusal on his lips, the desk clerk who looked like a disappointed vaudeville actor watched them cross the lobby to the desk.

Barrows disappointed him. Slipping his wallet from his pocket, he extracted a twenty dollar bill from it and spread it on the hotel blotter. "For information only," he said shortly, "about some tenants of yours who may not reside here permanently. The name is Smith. John Smith."

The clerk seemed disappointed. "I'm afraid you are wasting both our time, Mister. The Alhama seems to run to Smiths, and there are a lot of them named John."

"A big, red-faced, flashily-dressed man," Barrows described Smith. "And his wife is a tall thin

blonde with a decided preference for gin."

"An artificial blonde," Sally added.

"Oh, *those* Smiths," the clerk said. "Yes, they live here. They have a permanent suite, but they aren't here right now. They haven't been for a month. We have been forwarding their mail to the Antler Inn in Fawnskin."

Barrows was familiar with the mail. He had handled it on that end, circulars most of it. "They get along well together?" he asked.

"As far as I know," the clerk said. "They both are quite heavy drinkers." He nodded at the closed bar. "But in the two months they've been here, they've done all of their drinking together."

Barrows was disappointed. He asked if the clerk knew Smith's business. The clerk said he did not, and that Smith didn't seem to have any business but sitting at the bar and occasionally placing a bet on the horses.

"And I don't suppose you'd permit me to investigate their suite."

"Not for ten times twenty, Mister," the desk clerk said, shaking his head. "I don't like the air in San Quentin. It's too—close. Why? What's all this about the Smiths anyway? And who are you representing?"

"Myself," Barrows said shortly. "It's a bit of a personal affair." He lifted his palm so the clerk could pocket the bill. "Now, one last ques-

tion. You say they have stopped here for two months. During that time have you ever seen them in the company of a man as large or larger than Smith who talked mostly in French?"

"Several times," the clerk admitted. "A foreigner of some kind. At least he called me Monsieur and spoke with a French accent."

Sally Dale squeezed Clyde's arm. "I'm so glad. You were telling the truth."

The clerk turned to the key rack behind him. "In fact there is a letter here for him now in care of Smith." He found it and laid it on the desk. Postmarked, Paris, France, it was addressed in large, almost illiterate, scrawl to—*Monsieur Pierre Alonse, Alhama Hotel, San Francisco, U.S.A.*—in care of *Monsieur J. Smith*.

The desk clerk grinned. "Smith raised hell with Pierre the last time he had mail sent in care of Smith." He sniffed the envelope. "Perfume. Probably from some dame."

"You may be right," Barrows said. Knowing it would be useless to attempt to buy the letter and doubting its contents would prove of any value, he asked, without hope, "I don't suppose you know where this Pierre Alonse is stopping."

The clerk surprised him. "It just so happens I do. I've plugged Smith in to his hotel several times." He rubbed his thumb and forefinger together and Barrows laid another

bill, a ten this time, on the counter.

"The Eagle Hotel on Grand," the clerk said grinning. "You can't miss it. It's right on the edge of Chinatown. And come back any time, Mister. I'm always glad to be of help."

Out on the walk again the fog swirled about their heads and shadowed them in mist. The street lights were still on. So were the headlights of the passing cars. Clinging to Barrow's arm Sally took a few steps and stopped.

Following her eyes he saw a police car parked diagonally behind the car they had just quitted. One foot on the front bumper a uniformed officer was writing the license number in his note book.

They'd soon know he was in San Francisco. The hunt for him was on, and his borrowed time was shrinking. And all he had learned was the name of the big man who had grappled with him on the road and the fact he was known to Smith.

Taking Sally's elbow he walked her briskly up the street in the parade of the early morning workers who were beginning to appear on the perviously almost deserted street. It was only the fog that saved them. A moment later a second police car filled with plainclothes men howled past them to join the first.

"You'd better leave me," he said tightening his grip on Sally's arm, "before they involve you in this thing."

Sally Dale shook her head. "No.

You didn't do it—any of it. And we're going to clear you."

Barrows hoped so but he was beginning to doubt it. The charges against him were real and all he had to work on was shadows. A few blocks away they stopped in a small restaurant to eat.

As Barrows paid their check the cashier grinned openly at his battered face. "Boy. You've been on a dinger. You ought to get you a room somewhere and get some sleep."

"I'd like to," Barrows admitted. It seemed ages since he had slept. Outside he hailed a cab and asked to be driven to the Eagle Hotel. There was no use in trying to cover his trail. If the police questioned the clerk at the Alhama he would give them the same information he had given him.

The Eagle Hotel was small and dingy, on the fringe of Chinatown. There was an employment agency on one side of it, and a cheap Chinese restaurant on the other.

His hand on the butt of the gun he had taken from Sally's brother, Barrows told her, "You can't wait down here on the street. You'd best come in with me."

A series of filthy stairs, the riser of each marked *Eagle*, led up to a small first floor lobby. There was no one in the straight backed chairs against the wall or back of the small circular desk. A card near a tap bell read: RING FOR CLERK.

Barrows tapped it with his palm, and the bell tinkled in the morning



silence. But no one responded. He struck it again with the same result, then turning the old-fashioned book register around he thumbed back through its pages. Pierre Alonsey was listed as being in Room 312.

The second floor stairs was filthier than the first. The paint was peeling from the walls, and the smell of antiseptic failed to drown out the reek of cheap perfume and unwashed flesh.

Room 312 was at the end of a long narrow hall that seemed to wind back into the adjoining building. Most of the other rooms were dark in sleep but a light showed over its transom. As they neared it they could hear a man speaking in excited French. Pierre Alonsey was in his room.

Tugging the gun from his belt, Barrows lifted the barrel to tap on the door, then froze as a second voice said in perfect English: "All

right. Don't get your wind up. There's nothing to worry about. They'll pick him up sooner or later."

The short hairs on his neck tingling, Barrows looked at Sally. Either he had gone mad or he was hearing a dead man speak. The voice behind the door was John Smith's.

Her eyes round in the half light of the hall, Sally gasped, "That's Smith. I've heard his voice too many times to be mistaken."

Caution forgotten in his anger, Barrows rapped sharply on the door with the barrel of his gun. A moment of silence followed, then the big man with whom he had fought, dressed in gaudy purple silk pajamas, opened the door and stared from him to Sally Dale without seeming recognition.

"Oui, Monsieur?"

Barrows waved him back from the door with his gun and strode on into the room. "Don't give me that. Where is Smith? I heard his voice, so it will do you no good to lie to me."

His back to the closed room door the huge man stared stupidly at Barrows. The three were alone in the room.

"Pardon, Monsieur?"

"Don't give me that," Barrows said warningly. He yanked open a door. It proved to be a clothes closet—and empty.

Barrows strode to the door leading into the bathroom, and froze

with his hand on the knob as Sally cried out in terror behind him.

"He's got a knife! It was in his sleeve."

Turning, Barrows saw the sailor, no longer staring stupidly, pressing the point of a long, sharp knife to Sally's throat. The gun in his hand lifted, then lowered.

Smiling now, gold-toothed, Pierre Alonsey said, "That ees better. You are the most persistent homme, *Seigneur* Montagden. Be pleased to drop that gun."

"No," Sally cried. "Don't do it, Clyde. Shoot him!"

His back to the bathroom door, Barrows stood briefly undecided. Then suddenly the door in back of him was flung open and the gun butt in the hand that emerged slugged him viciously over the head.

Sally's screams ringing in his ears, Barrows crumpled to his knees, a mad thought racing through his brain. The huge Frenchman had called him *Seigneur* Montagden. Why? What had happened to his father and his two brothers?

"Cochon, swine-dog!" Crossing the room with the lithe tread of a panther Pierre Alonsey kicked Barrows in the face and he blacked out.

V

THERE WAS A wet smell of fish and of tide-flats. He was on or near

the sea, Clyde Barrows decided. The bobbing, rolling, motion of the bunk on which he was lying soon decided that. He was in the cabin of a boat, a small boat of some kind, not more than a thirty-footer. He lay wondering how he had got there and what had happened to Sally.

He'd acted the perfect fool, bargaining in the way he had. He opened his eyes with an effort and saw Sally on the dirty blanket of the bunk across the way. Her wrists and her ankles were tied but her eyes were open and she wasn't gagged.

"Thank God," she said quietly. "I was afraid that you were dead."

"I'm hard to kill," Barrows said. He glanced around the cabin. It was obviously the cabin of a small fishing charter boat. Fog-misted sunlight was streaming in the port holes, and from the motion of the boat they were riding at anchor in a bay or estuary.

"Where are we? And how did we get here?" he asked her.

She told him, "On a boat. He took us out a back door of the hotel. He told the cab driver you were drunk and threatened to kill you if I screamed."

"He?"

Sally said, "Pierre Alonsey. After you were slugged I screamed as loud as I could, but no one paid any attention."

Barrows asked, "And John Smith?"

"I didn't see him," she said. "If

it was Smith who hit you, he didn't come out of the bathroom. Pierre Alonsey went in and talked to him. Then he came out and dressed, and brought us here."

Barrows considered the information. It wasn't of much value. "Just where are we in the bay?" he asked.

Sally said she didn't know.

"And the Frenchman?"

She said he was on deck, or had been, a moment before. As she was speaking Pierre Alonsey poked his head in the cabin, then entering switched on a small radio over the galley. A blast of static came forth. Speaking over the noise, Barrows said hotly: "You can't get away with this."

Alonsey grinned gold-toothed but didn't bother to reply. Barrows tried to spread his bound hands, and couldn't. His wrists were tied with enough nylon forty-pound test fishing line to hold a whale.

"He won't say a word," Sally said. "I've pleaded and threatened and swore but all he does is grin. Someone has told him not to talk."

"Smith," Barrows said shortly. "Alonsey is the one weak spot in his murder chain. Neither Smith nor the blonde left the Inn yesterday afternoon until they left for good. Therefore it had to be a stooge who drugged my tea, packed my luggage with the money in it, put a gun in my hand and fired two shots, then drove me to that clearing where I regained consciousness. Pierre Alonsey was that stooge.

That's why he was so upset when I showed up at the highway again. He didn't know what to do. I wasn't supposed to come to until the posse found me.

"But what is it all about, Clyde?"

"A lot of money, I think," he said. "But I won't know for certain until I've been able to check with London."

Under the purple welts left by brutal handling, his face was lined and gray. He looked older somehow than Sally had ever seen him look before. It was as though pain or responsibility had aged him overnight.

"How about that, Alonsey?" he demanded.

The sailor ignored him to fiddle with the dials of the radio. Music replaced static. Then Alonsey found the newscast that he sought.

... Night desk clerk at the Alhama has positively identified Clyde Barrows as the man who accompanied by Miss Sally Dale entered the lobby of the hotel and offered him a bribe, which he refused, to be allowed to enter the John Smith suite, undoubtedly in quest of more loot. The Fawnskin sheriff having retained the two thousand eight hundred odd dollars that Barrows took from the body...

Barrows waited for the news commentator to mention the big Frenchman. Instead he went on to speculate whether or not Sally was accompanying him of her own free will. There seemed to be two

schools of thought. One said she was under his influence, the other that he had threatened her with death if she dared to make an outcry. The F.B.I. had been called into the case on the kidnapping angle. But there was no mention of Alonsey or Barrows' request of the clerk for information concerning him.

The Frenchman confirmed his suspicion. "I make the phone call," he grinned. "Tell desk clerk if he keep the mouth shut he find a lot of money. He talk, police find him with throat cut. He very wise man. N'est-ce pas. Seigneur?"

The news commentator interrupted himself. *"Just a moment. I have been handed a bulletin from the sheriff's office in Fawnskin. Smith's body has been found in an old mine shaft near the scene of Barrow's escape. It is believed he was still alive when he was dropped into the shaft for the body is livid and swollen almost beyond recognition by rattlesnake bites. Identification was made by the widow and papers found in Smith's pockets, and a three-carat good-luck diamond which Smith habitually wore."*

"That's it," Barrows said. "That's all I needed to know."

He swung his bound ankles to the deck plates and by twisting his body and using both hands as one managed to extract his cigarette lighter from the pocket of his sodden topcoat. Flicking it into flame

he reached across the way and lighted Sally's cigarette.

But before he could light his own Alonsey picked the cigarette from his lips, crumpled it between his fingers, turned off the radio and went back up on deck, fastening the rasp of the hatch behind him.

As soon as the hatch door closed behind the big Frenchman Sally said, "But if Smith's body was found in the old Murillo shaft—"

"A body was found," Barrows corrected her. "There had to be a body to make certain I was executed. Just as my body has to be found to make certain that I'm dead."

Smoke curled up and got into her eyes. "But—I don't understand," Sally said.

"I'm beginning to," he said quietly. Balancing on his bound feet and using the fingers of both hands he picked the offending cigarette from her lips. He stooped and kissed her, then sat back on the bunk again. There was no telling how much time they had.

"What are they going to do to us?" she asked.

"I don't know," he lied. Puffing at the cigarette to get it glowing he held it with the tips of his fingers and attempted to bend it back, so it would touch the fish line on his wrists.

A bob of the boat jostled it from his fingers. He picked it from the deck plates and considered trying to free Sally first. Then he realized

he was acting from inner panic. He wasn't using his head. Snuffing out the cigarette he propped his lighter between his knees and glicking it into flame lowered his bound wrists over it. The pain was excruciating but he set his lips hard.

Sally started to cry out. He stopped her with his eyes. One strand of fish line, then another, and another gave. His hands free he repeated the treatment on his ankles, then removing his shoes searched the cabin for a weapon. All he could find was an empty beer bottle.

He smashed the neck of it, then cutting Sally free lay back on his bunk, the jagged bottom of the bottle in one hand, just as the returning Frenchman withdrew the hatch rasp and looked into the cabin. "What make the noise of breaking down here?"

Barrows stared at the ceiling and refused to answer. Suspicious, the other man drew his wicked looking knife and descended the two-stair ladder.

"What make the noise of breaking?" he repeated.

He bent over Barrows to assure himself his wrists and ankles were still bound and Barrows lashed out with his crude weapon in a blow that cut one of Alonsey's plump cheeks to ribbons.

Screaming with pain and anger the big man attempted to use his knife. Doubling his feet to his chest Barrows kicked him in the

stomach, then rolled to his stocking feet to join in the mad scramble for the knife that had fallen from Alonsey's pain-paralyzed fingers. Barrows had no compunctions. This was his last chance for life. He meant to take it.

Sally screamed as the big Frenchman recovered his knife. But he promptly lost it again as Barrows pushed him off balance. Retaliating, Alonsey pulled him down with him and banged his head on the deck plates. Arching his body like a cat, Barrows pulled free and away. The struggle grew even more violent.

As he fought Alonsey swore a steady stream in French. Barrows fought silently except for the increased tempo of his breathing and an occasional, "hah" to clear his throat. He had no breath to waste. His opponent was both strong and tricky. He outweighed him by fifty pounds and Barrows was pretty sure that he had learned his business in barroom brawls from Port Said to Lourenco Marques.

Clyde Barrows knew he had to keep out of the other man's arms if he could. He had felt those steel cables before. They could snap his spine like a match. There was no longer any reason to keep him alive. The police were convinced of his guilt. All that was needed to complete the farce was his body.

Scooping the knife from the deck plates Pierre Alonsey lunged savagely at Barrows. Barrows side-

stepped the thrust, and felt steel burn across his ribs. Then he clamped on a pressure lock and put all of his weight behind it. There was a sharp snapping of bone.

The Frenchman's eyes turned glassy, and all of the expression went out of his face. He slumped to the floor in a dead faint.

It was a full minute before Barrows could speak, and when he did his voice was choked. "Whether they shoot me or not we'll have to turn Pierre Alonsey over to the police, if only to prove that he does exist. Then I have to make two over-seas phone calls to London. One to my family's solicitors, the other to Scotland Yard."

VI

A COLD SNAP had followed the rain but Ogilvey had changed his mind about closing the Inn. The morbidly curious, attracted by the lurid stories in the newspapers, and the reputed fact that Mrs. Smith was still stopping at the Antler Inn, had crowded into Fawnskin all day. Every room was filled. The bar was doing capacity business. He almost wished Barrows was back on the desk. He had been a capable clerk.

Campbell Fields, at his daughter's insistence, and a few other of the Fawnskin big shots were out to get Peg Dale's scalp. They claimed that the affair proved a one-legged

man was incapable of being sheriff.

Ogilvey glanced at his watch. It was eight o'clock. Cam Fields and Bill Tenny, the district attorney, were probably in Peg's office now. They had wanted him to go along but live and let live was his motto.

Ogilvey interrupted his train of thoughts to tell a youthful couple he was sorry but he hadn't a vacant room with or without a bath, then turned to watch a mousey-appearing gray-haired man with horn-rimmed spectacles mounting the room stairs furtively. To the best of his knowledge the man wasn't a guest but so many had registered since noon and there had been so much confusion he couldn't be certain.

He started to challenge the man's right to go up stairs, then dismissed it as unimportant. What with murder and kidnapping to prove it there were far worse things than two people sleeping in a bed that had been rented for one.

Outside the Inn the first cold wind of fall whistled about the eaves and through the pines and on down the single main street to Sheriff Matt Dale's office.

A white-haired, bullet-headed man who was reputed to have the first grove that he had ever foreclosed on, Campbell Fields, Fawn-skin's leading and only banker, was laying down the law.

"It's not that we don't like to sympathize with you, Peg," he insisted, "but this affair, allowing a



scrawny little maverick like that murdering English desk clerk to trick you and then throw you over his back the way he did shows how really physically incapable you are since your—er—" he cleared his throat—"accident."

"That's one way of putting it," Dale said. "But there wasn't much room in Korea to duck."

Bill Tenny the district attorney pleaded, "Be reasonable, Matt."

Dale said hotly, "Why don't you

tell the truth? You guys want me out of office because I try to enforce what few laws there are on the books." He drummed his fingers on his desk. "Yes. And if I'm still sheriff next year I think I'll shut up the slot machines."

"It's bad enough," Fields said, "for a thing like this to happen in a town without a capable sheriff. But to allow the prisoner to escape is inexcusable!"

Bill Tenny pounded on Dale's desk. "And to make matters worse you have for all practical purposes arrested Smith's innocent wife. Why? You aren't going to attempt to allege she was in collusion with Barrows, are you?"

"No," Dale said.

"Then why did you order her to stay in town?"

"She is a material witness," Dale pointed out the law. "And if we catch the killer it might be we'll need her testimony."

"We," Fields snorted. "For the last time, Dale. Will, or will you not, resign so we can elect a capable man in your place?"

Up the street, somewhere near the Inn, an auto honked three times. Dale got to his feet, favoring his peg leg, and reached his hat and wind-breaker from the wooden coat rack. "Well, I'll tell you, Mr. Fields," he said.

"Yes—?"

"The answer is 'no.'" Shaping his hat to his head Dale stumped across the office to the door.

"Now," if you will excuse me, I have an appointment with a dead man."

"He's mad," Fields echoed the slamming door.

OUTSIDE THE office the wind shifted and picking up a newspaper dropped sometime during the day along with the other debris the curious crowds had left on Main Street carried the paper back toward the Inn and in a playful mood plastered it briefly against one of the second-story windows.

Her mind fogged with gin, Bess Smith started nervously to her feet as the flapping paper tapped against her window before sailing off into the night, then remained at the window staring out at the tall dark writhing pines.

Damn such a country. Damn Fawnskin. Damn the money. Damn Harry. He had assured her it would be a cinch, a few questions and nothing more. Now she wasn't so certain. Not only had Clyde Barrows escaped, he was still at large, and the strapping one-legged local sheriff had practically ordered her to remain in Fawnskin.

She gulped her most recently ordered drink and considered going down to the bar and playing the bereaved widow. She was lonely in her room—and frightened. Why didn't Harry contact her, tell her what to do? What if something had gone irreparably wrong?

She reached for the phone to

order another drink sent up and froze, too terrified to scream, as the face materialized outside her window.

It was her nerves. She was drunk. It just couldn't be Clyde Barrows looking in her window. Her window was on the second floor, and he was in San Francisco being hunted by the police for murder.

She made a gesture with one hand as if to wave the face away. Instead the sash was raised on well-oiled slides and Barrows climbed over the sill into the room. "I'm real, very real," he assured her. He closed the window behind him. "And I think we have something to discuss, don't you?"

She found her voice but it was small. "Get out of here. If you don't go I'll scream for the police."

The blonde started for the door and stopped halfway as it opened and the mousey-appearing gray-haired man with horn-rimmed spectacles whom Ogilvey had seen mounting the stairs entered the room with a .45 Webley in one hand. He closed the door, leaned against it, and pointed the gun at Barrows.

"You can't win, can you, Clyde?" he said quietly. "I was afraid something like this might happen when Alonsey didn't turn up on schedule and no report was made of finding your body."

The blonde sobbed, "Harry," and would have thrown herself in his arms from sheer relief.

He waved her away. "Where is the girl?" he demanded of Barrows. "And how much does she know? How much do you know for that matter?"

Poised on the balls of his feet, his arms extended stiffly from his body, Barrows admitted, "I've talked to London."

"That tears it," the blonde sobbed.

The mousey-appearing man shook his head. "Not necessarily. If I can get back to Paris without it being known I was in America we can still pull it out of the fire. I should have known better than to trust Alonsey to dispose of them, but I hadn't much choice in the matter. I had other irons to attend to. You killed him?" he asked Barrows.

The young Englishman's smile was tight. "Alonsey will never be the same."

Ignoring the answer to his question the gray-haired man told the blonde, "We'll have to chance the girl knowing the truth. There is no way she can prove it. Here's the new lay. Pay close attention. Clyde obviously came up a ladder. I'll leave the same way after shooting him.

"Your story is, he broke into your room and attempted to shoot you to keep you from testifying against him. Fortunately you were able to wrest the gun away from him and shoot him before he could. This is his gun and can be traced

to him. That's your story. Stick with it and we'll be in the clear."

As he spoke he kept moving the barrel of the gun over Barrows' body as if anticipating an attack.

The blonde repeated, parrot-like, "He broke into my room and attempted to shoot me to keep me from testifying against him. Fortunately I was able to wrest the gun from him and shoot him before he could."

"Check," the gray-haired man said curtly.

His eyes cold, he leveled the gun on Barrows' heart only to shift his aim and fire, cursing, at the window as Sheriff Matt Dale's face and shoulders appeared outside the pane.

The sheriff's heavy Colt drowned out the shattering of glass. Barrow hurled himself forward before the gray-haired man whom the blonde called Harry could shoot again. He tore the gun from Harry's hand and beat him over the head with it as Sheriff Dale, dependent mainly on his arms, heaved himself over the sill.

With the strength of desperation, the would-be killer turned away from Barrows and raced out into a hall suddenly peopled with armed men. He darted past them before they could use their guns. Barrows at his heels, the man called Harry fled down the stairs through the lobby and into the bar where Barrows finally stopped him with a flying tackle that sent both men

crashing to the floor almost at Cam Field's feet.

Snatching a bottle from the bar the banker screamed, "It's Barrows! It's the killer!"

He made a wild swipe at the former hotel clerk's head but before he could swing the bottle again, Sheriff Dale, red-faced from the exertion, stumped across the bar-room and tore the bottle from his hand.

"Stop it, you damn fool," he swore. He pointed at the unconscious gray-haired man. "He's the dead man. He's Smith. He's the guy I had the appointment with."

"Smith?" the banker muttered, puzzled.

Barrows got wearily to his feet. "Or my cousin, Harold Montgaden."

One of the F.B.I. men who had followed the three down the stairs walked over to Clyde Barrows. He put out his hand. "My name is Stephen McGrath. I'm very glad I finally caught up with you. I have a darn interesting story to relate."

SEATED AT THE bar, Sally one side of him and a steaming cup of tea on the other, Clyde Montgaden admitted, "I should have guessed the set-up sooner. But I had been out of touch with my family for three years, making good on my own, as they say. One year I spent in a lumber camp quite far up in the bush. Last year, I tried ranching in Montana.

"This year, as you know, I clerked at the hotel, not reading the papers much and blissfully unaware of the fact that my father and both of my brothers had been killed in a plane crash and I was being sought for. In fact the solution really didn't occur to me until Pierre Alonsey called me seigneur in that grubby hotel room."

From the edge of the gaping crowd in the barroom, Mary Fields asked: "Alonsey?"

"The big man in a striped shirt and brown beret who didn't exist," he told her gravely. "My relation's partner in crime. A most unpleasant fellow. I was forced to batter him around a bit more this afternoon before I could get Miss Dale and myself ashore. I immediately contacted my family's solicitors and Scotland Yard who suggested I tell the whole story to the American F.B.I."

Federal Agent McGrath grinned. "Battered him up, hell. He ruined Alonsey. And you should see the guy. He's six-foot-three and weighs two hundred pounds or better."

Clyde Montgaden made light of what he had done. "No credit to me, you know. A man does what he has to do when it's a choice between dying and staying alive. Anyway it was Pierre Alonsey who, acting under my cousin's orders, put chloral in my tea, made certain I had powder stains on my hand by substituting an inferior gun for my own, and then drove me



in my own car to the clearing where I was supposed to be found by the sheriff's posse and promptly dispatched to the gas chamber as soon as the blonde had told her fictitious story."

He paused to squeeze Sally's hand and sip at the cup of tea.

"It was the perfect frame," Sheriff Matt Dale said. "And I admit it had me fooled until around five o'clock this afternoon when the San Francisco F.B.I. office phoned me that Sally was safe and told me the score. We even had a body by then with two bullet holes in its head that checked with the gun we had taken from Clyde Barrows. Oh, I'm sorry—Montgaden," he corrected himself.

Clyde Montgaden looked at the scowling gray-haired man handcuffed to the blonde. "That's going to take a bit of explaining, Harold," he said. "But then you are good at that sort of thing. I've heard the governor say a dozen times that you could lie your way out of hell."

"He'll have a chance to try," Federal Agent McGrath said coldly. "The dead man in the shaft was probably some bum he picked up off skid-row. The local sheriff isn't to blame, because, you see, the body was identified by Smith's wife. The dead guy, to all intents and purposes, was Smith."

Sally explained, "There wasn't really any Smith. That was just a name and a character that Clyde's cousin assumed to 'die' under, so Clyde would go to the gas chamber and he would inherit his estate as the last of the Montgadens. He knew no one would recognize him as Smith with the black dye off his hair, the pads gone from his cheeks and clothing, and without that pair of horn-rimmed glasses he's wearing.

"Besides he didn't mean to appear again at all. He wouldn't have if Alonsey had showed up as scheduled to report our bodies had been left—wherever he was supposed to leave them."

"That was smart reasoning," Stephen McGrath said. "Montgaden convinced us that Pierre Alonsey and the blonde were the weak spots in the murder chain and

that when the big Frenchman failed to show up Harold would beat it back up here on the assumption the man he had tried to frame had got away from Alonsey and would look up the blonde again in an attempt to get the truth out of her. We've been waiting in a car outside the Inn since shortly after seven o'clock for Harold to show."

"Then I almost didn't recognize him," Clyde Montgaden admitted. "I didn't while he was posing as John Smith. It's been a dozen years since I have seen him. He was the black sheep of the family—not in good repute, you know. Always mixed up in some swindle or another—the last we heard he was in Marseilles. He's been living in France, off and on, for years."

The handcuffed man made one last weak attempt to clear himself.

"It's all a damned lie," he protested. "I don't even know what he's talking about. My name is John Wilson. I was a friend of Smith's and I merely drove up here tonight to see if there was anything I could do for his wife."

Clyde Montgaden shook his head. "I'm afraid that won't wash, Harold. You've been in too many scrapes before and when I talked to Scotland Yard I asked them to forward your fingerprints which rather stymies that story. For old crime's sake, one might say."

Stephen McGrath turned to Bess Smith. "Unless you sing, lady," he said, "I'm afraid you'll be in an

awful mess. As an accessory to a crime, you might have to pay dearly for the death of the derelict, if it's proven he was murdered by Harold. It'll be easier on you if you turn State's witness."

"I'll talk," the blonde screamed. "I'll talk. He told me it would be easy. He told me I'd never have to worry about money again. He said I'd live in a castle—But I didn't kill anyone. All I did was put on that act and lie about him being shot while all the time he was busy stuffing the body of the derelict he dressed in his clothes into the old mine shaft."

Federal Agent Steve McGrath asked Mack Ogilvey if he could use his office and guided the handcuffed pair into it. His face set in grim lines, Clyde Montgaden took Sally by the hand and tried to walk out of the barroom with her. As they walked past Campbell Fields the banker hesitantly tapped Clyde on the shoulder, a new respect in his eyes.

"Just a minute, son," he said. "The estate that was mentioned—was it so valuable that your cousin would not have hesitated in resorting to murder in an effort to frame

you and claim it as the next rightful heir?"

Clyde Montgaden nodded. "Oh, yes! As a younger son I never expected to see any of it. I intended to make good on my own. It's an extremely large estate—a shipping line, several mines, and mills. Almost hate to go back to England, in a way, but I'm afraid I must. I am the last of the line now and I know my father would want me to carry on the family name. You see, a title goes with the estate. That's what *seigneur* means in France. And knowing my father and brothers were dead and that I was Lord Montgaden it apparently just slipped out of Pierre Alonsey's mouth."

Mary Fields gasped. "Lord Montgaden!"

Clyde was finally successful in guiding Sally out of the crowd surrounding them. Then he and Sally were alone on the cool, wind-swept porch of the Inn and she was in his arms and he was kissing her. "How do you like that, Lady Montgaden," he said.

Sally wrinkled her nose at him. Then, her eyes shining, she laughed softly.

The Sheriff liked to tramp the woods in search of game. But manhunts appalled him.

by WILL F. JENKINS



THE HUNTERS

JOE JUDSON hung up the wall-telephone receiver and grunted ruefully. He had just finished cleaning and oiling his gun and it was good hunting weather. Only half a mile away was a patch of

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cover that very few people knew about, and that he'd hunted only once this season. But the birds knew about it, and he'd intended to slip down there for awhile and maybe go on to another place that was equally promising, and still another. Without a dog, while Betsey was away, he probably wouldn't get a full bag—fly-backs would be his best shots—but he might have had a nearly perfect day.

The phone conversation had called it off. He looked regretfully at the shotgun and slipped a revolver into his hip pocket instead. He pinned his badge into the lining of his leather and made a hole for rain to seep through. He put on the cap with the fur ear laps and went out of his cabin.

The air had an invigorating tang to it. Scent would lie low today. The woods were a riot of every conceivable color from the palest yellow of poplar leaves through the gold of maple and russet-brown of oak to cedar and the vivid shade of pine. There were smells to tickle the nostrils.

Wet earth and running water, and molding fallen leaves, and the myriad small odors—pungent and heady—of autumn hunting weather. Leaves rustled irregularly, and the brook downhill cascaded over rocks with a brittle tinkling. Even the telephone wire leading to the cabin made a little humming noise that said cold

weather would almost certainly be along in a day or two.

Joe Judson shook his head regretfully and tramped down from his porch and set off along the bottom. Man hunting was quite different from game hunting. Game hunting was sport. You pitted yourself and a dog against all the cunning of wild things who knew the country better than you did, and the tricks of men as well as men themselves. If they won, you honored them for it. If you won, you didn't feel ashamed.

Man hunting was different. It wasn't sport. It was grim business. Joe Judson would have given a lot if the prison hadn't been built over Hadley way. Not that there were many breaks, of course. They barely averaged one a year, and he had to admit that was a very good average indeed with fifteen hundred men behind walls. But he wished the prison wasn't there. If nature alone held sway all hunting would be clean hunting.

He went down the bottom, with the brittle leaves rustling about his feet. A red squirrel vanished around the bole of the seed oak tree at its end. Joe saw the squirrel only out of the corner of his eye, but he grinned a little. Smart, those fellas.

A jump, and Joe Judson was across the brook. He knew what he had to do. A man who's running away sticks to low ground,

and stays in brush for the most part. He dodges open country, and shuns a hill crest like the plague, because on the summit of a hill he can be seen from a long distance. So if you know which way a man started and how the draws run, you can tell almost infallibly that he'll come up this hollow or that one, even ten or fifteen miles away. With state cops to block the highways and search all cars, the thing is a mathematical certainty.

Joe's immediate task was to block one of the places toward which escapees were driven by their own furtiveness. But the sheriff had said this man seemed to be headed somewhere else.

A quarter-mile beyond the brook, he heard something that sounded like a gobbler calling. Five minutes later he heard the sound again. He hadn't been out after turkey so far this season. They were scarce, and very difficult to bag. He swung aside to make sure he was right. It would be a couple of hundred yards and down the brook bank—the brook was a lot bigger here—and up the other side. He ought to find the gobbler in that patch of beech trees. Mark down his feeding ground and come back tomorrow.

He reached the top of the bank, his nostrils filled with the smells of the woods. Then a fallen rotted sapling rolled under his foot and he went sliding down and almost

into the brook, with a mass of dry leaves and dampish litter following him. He hit a tree root and felt the jar. He knew his revolver was jolted out of his hip pocket and he'd have to pick through all the mass of trash to find it, and it would take time.

But then he heard a noise that couldn't have been made by a gobbler.

There was a man within ten yards of him, armed with a shotgun. His face was deathly pale and there was a hunted, desperate look in his eyes. He was keeping the gun steadily on Joe Judson.

Joe thought to himself, "He ain't in the bottom! First one ever to fool us." Then he thought, "My pistol's in those leaves. If I hunt for it he'll probably suspect I dropped it and shoot."

So he sat up where he sprawled and said sheepishly: "Hell! Like to broke my neck. Did you hear that gobbler, too?"

The man wet his lips, and the hand holding the weapon trembled a little. He wasn't in prison uniform. He had on regular hunting boots, and his pants were tucked into them professionally. He was wearing a stained, well-worn hunting jacket that had a hunting-license pin stuck on the breast of it. The jacket fitted the description the sheriff had given Joe. So did the man himself.

"Yeah," said the man, dry-

throated. "I was listening for him to call again."

"I bet he's to hell an' gone now," said Joe regretfully. "I made a lot of noise."

Joe's hands fumbled among the leaves. But he didn't dare search too openly. He was quite sure that the man was desperately trying to decide whether or not to shoot. Blasting would give him a better chance to get away, but the shot might bring somebody. And a dead man left behind . . .

Joe felt that he knew every thought that was passing through the other man's mind as he debated whether or not to commit another murder. It was not comfortable. Joe sweated as he fumbled for his pistol.

Then the gobbler called again. Judson could not hide from himself the fact that he was in a tight spot, because an escaped murderer could probably decide he'd be safest with Joe dead. But when the gobbler called, briefly, off in the woods, Joe's eyes flickered toward the spot. He couldn't find the revolver. It was somewhere in no more than six inches of leaves, but he couldn't find it, and suspicion appeared in the murderer's eyes.

"I guess I looked like a damn fool, rollin' down that bank," Joe said.

He got up, brushing leaves off himself. "He must have killed somebody for that huntin' outfit,

gun an' all," Joe thought. "But the sheriff said something about a dog. The dog'll tell."

He looked toward the spot of the turkey call again. He felt the murderer's hunted eyes desperately weighing this thing against that, and that against the other, and his life in the balance against all.

"Say," said Joe Judson, "I'm not huntin' today, but I'd sure like to get a glimpse of that old gobbler. Haven't seen one since the season opened. Got a turkey call? Where's your dog?"

The man shook his head and then nodded off to Joe's right. Apparently he didn't have a turkey call, but the dog was there, tied to a sapling.

"Hm—" said Judson. "Not so good without a call, but let's go over an' see if we can catch a glimpse of him. Maybe even a shot. Then we can come back for the dog. I might show you a place or two where that dog'll have himself a time. I know these woods like the back of my hand."

He was enormously relieved since he'd seen the dog. The dog was sniffing interestedly, moving his head from side to side to catch his—Joe's—scent.

"Dog that's seen a man killed," thought Joe relievedly, "gets all wrought up. It doesn't seem natural to him and he gets nervous. This fellow ain't killed anybody today—yet. He must have had a

friend get his outfit ready for him."

Judson waded forward through the leaves in the direction of the last sound from the gobbler. The man seemed to come to a wrenching decision. He followed.

It wasn't far. They heard the gobbler again and Joe suddenly realized they were almost on top of him. The man's face had changed. He was still pale, but it was a natural pallor now. Prison pallor. His mouth no longer looked taut and strained.

"He's a hunter!" thought Joe, in surprise. "Sure enough! Murderer he may be, an' runaway he is, but he's a hunter too!"

Judson went on ahead with practiced, accustomed stealth until he heard a tiny sound. Then he froze and beckoned to the other.

He saw the man move forward with infinite caution. All at once feathered speed exploded almost in Joe's face, and partridges rocketed upward. Six of them, whirling in the swift panic that not only disconcerts the hunter but warns any other game within a half mile. Joe Judson jerked his head to watch the man. He'd leapt back, incautiously, and sticks had snapped underneath his feet. His gun was up, but he waited, his eyes bright.

Judson understood approvingly. The man was waiting to see if the gobbler would fly, and if he did—

The gobbler flew. The partridges didn't set him off, but the snapped sticks did. A big fellow, with huge wattles and a wing-spread to make your mouth water. Two hens with him. He flung himself through the air a good forty yards away.

The man's gun went off. Once, twice, with a thunderous roar.

Something dropped, cleanly still on the moment of landing. Something else fluttered, landed, and scuttled away. Partridges. The man's face was flushed. His eyes were alight.

"I had to make it that way," said the man. His face wasn't pale any longer, for a flush had replaced the prison pallor. "That gobbler was right in among brush. So I tried for the birds. One was a pretty long shot."

His breath wasn't even. His eyes looked queer, almost as if they stung. But they shone. His mouth twisted a little. Joe thought to himself remorsefully, "He's been eatin' his heart out there in the jailhouse. He thought he'd never see the woods again!"

"Listen," said the man. "One wasn't a clean kill. Let's get the dog to find him. I hate to leave a cripple behind."

This was the thing for which Joe Judson had reserved judgment. He lumbered away in the wake of the man. His step was no longer elastic, for he was wrestling with a problem. He waded

through leaves up to the dog, who was on his feet now and quivering. He'd heard the whir of the birds and the sound of the shots. The instant the man released him he was off like an arrow to the place of hunting.

Joe Judson looked at the place where he'd slid down. The man was waiting for him. If Joe started searching for his pistol again he'd either find it or not. If he didn't find it, the man would be suspicious. If he did find it, somebody would get killed. Maybe likely—much more likely—Joe himself. He thought yearningly, "Hunting weather like this don't come every day." It was no day to get killed on.

Joe tramped back with the man, still unarmed and now sweating freely. The dog came up with the crippled bird. He gave it to his new master, his tail wagging. The man drew a deep breath.

"I didn't remember that living could feel so good," he said, as if to himself.

Then he looked sharply at Judson and the look said as plain as words that he'd remembered what he was, and where he was. And he'd remembered also that if he wanted to get away clean, it would be a mistake to leave anybody behind to talk about having seen him in a hunting suit with a shotgun and a dog. It was time to commit another murder. His eyes went

cold. But then—and Joe Judson saw it in his face—he thought of something.

"Look here," the man said harshly. "I meant to ask you. When I started out this morning, they told me a prisoner had escaped over at Hadley. What do you know about that?"

He brought his gun around, as if he wanted Joe to think that their roles were reversed and that he was an innocent hunter, and Joe Judson quite possibly the man the Law was seeking.

Joe Judson's heart began to beat more regularly again. "They break out over at Hadley sometimes," he said quickly. "Mostly they get caught before they've gone far. None of 'em ever comes this way." Then he looked up. "Say, did you think I might be him?"

He grinned, but he wished desperately that he had his pistol. The man let his face relax.

"My old dog Betsey's over to the vet's," said Joe Judson. "She'll be home next week. But I ain't got the heart to hunt without her. I was just pokin' around, markin' down some likely cover . . . Your dog's off yonder. Mind if I come along a minute or two? I bet I can show you hunting you won't believe."

"Sure, come along," the man said. "I guess you're all right."

But he said it with an odd inflection, and Judson could trace

his every thought. "He's lettin' me go for the minute," he thought. "Like, if I had my pistol, I might give him his head for awhile. But he has a pistol in that side pocket where he put one of those birds."

They tramped through the rustling leaves without speaking for a full minute.

"How d'you work that dog?" Joe Judson asked. "Better call him, hadn't you? We don't want him to lose track of us."

The dog had gone on ahead, making long casts, but they caught occasional glimpses of him wriggling through brush.

"I never worked him before," the man replied. "My brother just sent him on to me, for a present."

"Nearly true, maybe," Joe thought.

"Around here people don't use whistles much," Judson said. "He's probably voice-broke."

He shouted. Echoes rang among the tree trunks. Ringing, lingering echoes. The man started, and stopped dead in his tracks. The instinct of the fugitive is to remain unheard as well as unseen.

Quite suddenly the dog trotted into view. Judson waved him over to the left. He wagged his tail and obediently plunged into brushwood again.

"Well broke," said Joe approvingly. "We'd better try to keep him in sight, though."

Joe led the way. His compan-



ion followed, his eyes gleaming. Because, of course, he'd realized that two men, hunting with due accompaniment of noise, are vastly less suspicious objects than one man moving furtively.

But he appeared to forget that aspect as time wore on. Joe forgot it too. He led the way to a patch of cutover land, and they beat it from end to end and found nothing. They went over a fair-sized ridge and birds sailed away before them. The birds got into second-growth stuff and they went after them. The covey scattered to individual birds. They worked the

wood. The man killed a fly-back, clean, and suddenly stopped.

"I'm no hog," he said. "Hunting a covey's all right. Single birds—I don't like it."

Joe Judson warmed to him. When the man had easy shots and hard ones to choose from he invariably took the hard ones and like a true hunter held an easy kill in contempt. There are two ways to know what a man is like. One is to play poker with him. The other is to hunt with him.

And he's a murderer," thought Joe vexedly. "He'd kill me without hesitation if he'd suspected I'd be duty-bound to be just as relentless toward him in a law-abiding way."

It was funny to like a man who, you knew, simply had to kill you before he parted from you. Joe Judson had the man's plan pretty well worked out in his mind by now. He was already better than a dozen miles from the prison, and undoubtedly believed he had everybody looking in another direction altogether. With a gun and a hunting dog, and birds, he should have been a figure nobody could possibly suspect. By tomorrow morning he'd stand a good chance of being twenty miles away. Sleeping out nights, and hunting by day he'd be able to move along nearly as long as the hunting season lasted, covering maybe a couple of hundred miles on foot, if necessary.

But today, the first day, he couldn't afford to leave anybody behind to tell of a white-faced man who'd appeared in a hollow with a dog and a gun near Hadley, and didn't even know if his dog was voice, or whistle-broke.

"I know about one more place we got time to go to before sundown," said Judson. "Right over this hill. I guess we'll call it a day, then."

He led the way. Down at the bottom of the slope there was a farmhouse. In the slanting sunlight of late afternoon it looked cozy, and tight, and prosperous. Even a telephone line followed a fence up to the house. Its fields were clean and cared-for, slanting down gently from where Joe and the man stood.

"Over there," said Joe, pointing. "There's some wild buckwheat behind that house and about sundown there are usually birds in it."

He led the way across the new-plowed field. The man hesitated for an instant, then followed.

For the first time since they had been together they could see for miles rather than for yards in brush or clearings. The world was full of the sunset hush. A youth of eighteen or twenty chopped wood down at the farmhouse, and the sharp, distinct strokes of his ax were clearly audible.

They were alone in a vast open space that grew and grew about

them, and the colored sunlight smote upon them as if especially to point them out. There were shadows in the furrows. It was very close to sunset.

"I don't believe," said the man uneasily, "we're going to have time to do much hunting over there."

"Maybe a shot or two," said Joe. He thought, "This is the first time I've been where he wouldn't dare shoot me dead, and he's thinkin' about it harder than ever before."

He hated what he was doing. He hated, much more, what he would have to do. But he had no choice. No more choice than the man beside him. Man hunting wasn't like game hunting. It was grim business.

An elderly man moved toward them from the farmhouse. He was a small, distinct figure, and his legs moved jerkily. He didn't have a gun. He just walked out toward them.

The escaped convict said harshly: "What's he coming out here for?"

"Just to pass the time of day, I imagine," said Joe. "I know him. His name's Bob Simon."

"If he starts any—" Abruptly Joe Judson's companion locked his lips, as if realizing that his voice had sounded savage and menacing. Judson saw him put one hand in his right-hand game pocket, and was pretty sure he

knew what he was doing. Rearranging the birds in there. Putting the pistol he carried among them, on top.

They plodded on. The man from the farmhouse drew nearer.

"Hi, Simon," called Joe. "I'm takin' my friend for a couple of shots in your back pasture. All right with you, ain't it?"

The man from the farmhouse stopped stock-still. The sun was behind him. They couldn't see his face.

"Friend of mine," repeated Joe. "From the city. Right good shot, and a good sport. If I brought him sooner, he'd have done damage to your huntin', but he won't have time to more than sample it now. You don't mind, do you?"

The man from the farmhouse rumbled: "Just like you say, Joe. Friend o' yours? Go ahead."

"Fixed that bridge yet, Simon?" asked Joe. "It'll make a short cut for me."

"Nope," said the elderly man. "But I'll get around to it some day."

He watched them pass, looking at them curiously. Then he turned and went back toward the farmhouse.

Joe and the man at his side went across the balance of the open field. The dog jumped and scrambled, and a moment later they could hear him rustling in the brush beyond. Judson slid

easily over. His throat felt queer as he stood waiting for the other to descend from the fence as they started toward the back pasture.

"Listen," said the man harshly, "I want to tell you. It's been good hunting today. I guess it's been just about the best day of my life."

"Shucks!" said Joe. Remorse wrenched him. But then he saw the dog, and his momentary excitement drove every other thought from his mind. He cried, "Look there!"

The dog was pointing. A beautiful point. All the colors in all the world spread out upon the earth and dappled in the sky. A dying sunset and a point like that.

The shotgun went off, twice. The man swallowed, hard.

"The best day," he repeated. "Damn it, I wish—"

"Talk later," said Judson gruffly, with an ache in his throat. He liked this man, who was coming to an unwilling resolution to do murder again. "We ain't got much sunlight left."

They went across the pasture. Three times the dog pointed. Three times he flushed—fresh coveys each time. The last time they could barely see him. The man shouted huskily, and the dog went in. Birds rocketed, one soaring high with the last gleams of the sunset shining gold upon its breast.

The man fired. Feathers ex-

ploded from the soaring pheasant. A little later the dog came through the new darkness, panting and ecstatic, bringing the bird and wagging his tail joyously.

"That's all," said the escaped convict. His voice came a little bit thickly. "I—I've got to tell you something."

"I'll take you over to the highway," said Joe Judson. "You'll be able to get a lift home from there. Come along."

It was not far. They had heard, and ignored, the purring sound of motors in these last, superlative moments in this last cover.

"The highway's right over there," Joe said, pointing. "I'll have to wade the brook to get home, but you keep right on. Bob Simon never did fix that bridge after it went through with a wagon on it."

He moved to go away in the darkness. The man caught his arm.

"Listen!" he said fiercely. "I don't like this! I—I hate it! But I'm the man that broke out of Hadley this morning. I've got to—"

Joe Judson did not move again, but his scalp crawled. He said steadily: "I know. I'm a deputy sheriff. I was sent out to hunt for you. But when I slid down that bank I lost my pistol in the leaves and I never did get a chance to go back and hunt for it."

Silence. Judson knew that the

man's shotgun was trained upon him. He knew that the hammers had been drawn back. His throat was dry. But he'd hunted with this man.

"First I was just waitin' for a chance," he went on evenly. "There was three or four times when I was behind you, with heavy sticks or rocks within reach. I could have knocked you out cold at least twice, you not suspecting. But—"

The escaped convict said fiercely: "Why didn't you, then?"

"Man hunting ain't like game hunting," said Joe. "I saw that you were—kind of happy. Like you'd never figured you'd ever hunt again. And you hunt the way I like to see it done. So I figured that if I was in prison, and I broke out and it was hunting weather, if so be as somebody let me get in one day behind a good dog and a gun, it wouldn't be so hard going back again."

"I'm not goin' back! I'm goin' to—"

Joe Judson said regretfully: "Simon's whole farm is game sanctuary. No hunting is ever allowed on it, anytime. So he knew I wouldn't talk like I did unless something was wrong. He has a telephone, and my asking about the bridge told him where I'd bring you—"

There was a rustling near by.

A grim voice said: "Drop, Joe! We'll handle him!"

A flashlight beam smote upon the murderer. Another. Figures came into view, converging from every side. Grim, armed men emerged from concealment. They moved determinedly forward.

"I'm sorry," said Joe Judson, wretchedly. "But man hunting—"

He didn't drop to the ground. He stood resolutely before the murderer.

"It's not too late to kill you now," said the murderer in a queer, thick voice. But—I had one day of living, anyhow. And they were going to hang me—"

He whirled. He flung the shotgun with dangerous violence at the nearest indistinct approaching figure, then leaped for the darkness. The dog barked frantically. Almost simultaneously guns roared, and flames lanced through the night.

Minutes later, Joe Judson tried to soothe the murderer's dog. Joe's own hands trembled, but the dog was upset and terribly nervous. What had happened didn't seem natural to him. Nor to Joe. He'd never gotten quite used to man hunting. But he was glad the escaped convict had been given an opportunity to enjoy a last game hunt before the man hunt ended.

Joe Judson had rather liked him.

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THE CAPSULE

A man may have to wait a long time . . . for the wheels of justice to come full turn.

by
**FLETCHER
FLORA**

N EARLY THREE hatred-filled years had passed, postmortem, before Alvin Dudley had an opportunity to kill Carter Malin. The opportunity, when it came, was not the result of any deliberate manifestation of initiative on Alvin's part. Although his motive was vengeance and his hatred deep, it was not in his character to take positive action. Where other men might have pursued, Alvin merely waited.



He lived alone in a modest house in an unpretentious neighborhood. Six days a week he left for work promptly at seven-thirty in the morning, and returned just as promptly at five-thirty in the evening. He prepared most of his own meals, dining out rarely, and once a week he had a woman in for eight hours to clean and do his laundry. He was admired and respected by folk who knew his history. He was respected for his restraint. He was admired for his quiet courage.

Alvin had not always lived alone. Once, for a couple of years, he had shared the modest house with a wife. Her name was Wanda, and Alvin acquired her in what he considered at the time to be an incredible stroke of good luck.

It didn't quite turn out that way, but Alvin was deceived by one element of reality that obscured all the others. The truth was, Wanda was stupid, and she had the morals of a mink. She didn't even have the brains to exploit her remarkable physical assets, which was the only reason for her choice of Alvin. She could have done much better in the first place, and she could have done better, shortly thereafter, when she transferred her affections to Carter Malin.

Alvin was aware of his deficiencies, and he was properly grateful and humble. He had never expected to establish an exclusive claim to so much smoldering beauty.

And, to be exact, he never did.

Wanda was restless, and Alvin was understanding. He pampered her shamelessly and was paid off in unconcealed contempt. It was not long before she was making short trips to Kansas City once a month to alleviate her unrest, and to patronize the department stores. Alvin, who stayed at home, thought the change in environment did her good, and there were brief periods after each return when her tongue seemed to lose its sharpness and he was convinced he had not been mistaken.

However, the trips were soon lasting longer, and the bills from the Kansas City department stores kept getting bigger. Wanda was sometimes away for a week at a time, and the day arrived, of course, when she did not return at all.

Alvin received a letter which he showed to no one. The spelling was atrocious, but the meaning was unmistakably clear. It was written on a crisp sheet of stationery bearing the impressive crest of a Kansas City apartment-hotel, and it said in effect that Wanda had found her true love at last, a prosperous cosmetic salesman named Carter Malin, and had taken up quarters with him at the above address. Alvin was welcome to a divorce, and Wanda was sure that he would understand.

The implication was plain that he could, if he didn't, go jump over

a stump. Wanda's candor was perhaps as much a manifestation of her stupidity as it was of an easily understandable desire to flaunt her improved status. But Alvin, being what he was, ascribed it to a basic integrity of character that would have been derided by almost anyone else in Wanda's world, including Wanda herself.

He was terribly unhappy and quietly desperate. He considered going after Wanda and pleading with her to return, but he was too much in dread of her certain scorn. He even thought of buying a gun and going after Malin. But he lacked sufficient confidence in himself to resort to that kind of violence and had no stomach for the mess it would be certain to create. He did not, moreover, want to do anything to hurt Wanda.

In the end, he made a surreptitious trip to Kansas City and lurked about the apartment hotel until he saw Wanda and Malin together. Wanda looked smart and happy, even euphoric, and it was evident that "living in sin" was doing her no harm. Unseen and unheard, Alvin retreated, returned to his home and took up his routine.

He kept hoping that Wanda would eventually return, and he was prepared to receive her without recriminations if she did. But she didn't. When Alvin heard of her again, six months later, she was dead. Discarded by Carter Malin, she had, in the hoary tradi-

tion of melodrama, taken a handful of barbiturates and fallen into a fatal sleep.

Even Alvin's delusions had their limitations, and he had the wayward thought that her death was undoubtedly more of an accident than a suicide. She had made a gesture to frighten her lover, and had simply, through stupidity, taken too many pills. But that didn't matter. What mattered was that she was dead. She was dead, and Carter Malin was responsible.

Alvin claimed her body and brought her home and gave her a decent burial in a double cemetery plot, the other half of which was reserved for himself. Afterward, with no demonstration of the grief and hatred he felt, he made the adjustments necessary to a widower and went on living.

He took only one small step in the direction of vengeance. He purchased a few empty geletin capsules and some cyanide salts. The purchase of the deadly poison was made openly, and he signed a register without hesitation, offering a plausible explanation of the purchase as he did so. There was no suspicion in the druggist's eyes.

At home, he filled one of the capsules with salts, and thereafter he carried it with him at all times, just as he carried his keys and his loose coins. When he went to bed at night, he put it on the dresser with the other items, and when he dressed in the morning he tucked it

away securely into the watch pocket of his trousers.

Although his friends and neighbors didn't realize it, he was a man with a mission, and his mission was to kill Carter Malin. It was contrary to his nature to hunt Malin down, but he had an unreasoning conviction that the time would come when he and Malin would meet in circumstances exactly right for murder. Or justice, as he preferred to call it.

After all, Kansas City was not far away, and sooner or later Malin was certain to show up. Perhaps his sales area would be expanded to include this town. Perhaps he would merely stop off on his way through. Perhaps—any number of things. For whatever reason, he would surely come, and in the meanwhile Alvin was prepared and waiting. His position, in short, was a compromise between what he was and what he thought he should be. His great advantage was that Malin had never seen him and wouldn't recognize him.

And so he waited. And sure

enough, nearly three years later, Malin came. Alvin recognized him immediately, but there was no sign of it except the sudden barely discernible throbbing of a pulse in his throat. Malin was as natty and handsome as he had been when Alvin had seen him with Wanda in Kansas City. If he suffered from remorse for Wanda's fate, it was not apparent. In fact, his appearance of well-being was marred only by the shadow of a twenty-four-hour beard.

Alvin calmly finished the job he was doing, and then turned away. He drew some water into a paper cup. Removing the cyanide capsule from his watch pocket, he swallowed it with the water. There! It was done. In ten minutes he would be beyond the reach of temporal retribution. Any other kind he was willing to risk.

Turning back toward Carter Malin, he bowed slightly with just a touch of deference, holding his tonsorial bib aside like the cape of a matador.

"Next," he said.

NEXT MONTH

A BRILLIANT STORY

THE OLD ONES ARE HARD TO KILL

by Henry Slesar

When a gentle old lady stubbornly refuses to allow herself to be murdered . . . a ruthless killer may lose more than a few nights' sleep.

COPS DON'T HAVE WINGS

by
**NORMAN
HUNT**

DETEKTIVE SERGEANT Daniel Gilmore of the New York Police Department stepped swiftly out of his car and pocketed the keys as soon as he had locked it. Then he whirled around to the nearest uniformed policeman.

"Get me through this," he ordered. "Fast."

The people in the crowd which formed a rough circle around the building entrance parted to let Gilmore through, and went back to craning their necks upwards.

Somebody said, almost admiringly, "If what's going on up there isn't the damndest thing I've ever seen, I'm a Dutchman."

Gilmore passed into the building and strode quickly to the elevator that was being held open for him by a patrolman he didn't rec-

The man on the ledge was in trouble. So was Sergeant Gilmore.



ognize. He got out of it a minute or so later, and walked rapidly down the narrow hallway to the apartment at the very end. The uniformed man who opened the door at Gilmore's first knock stepped quickly to one side.

"Are you with the police, too?" a woman asked Gilmore levelly. She was sitting on a hard chair tightly clasping a pair of long white gloves. She must have been in her late thirties. "Can you get my husband off the ledge?"

"I'll do my best," Gilmore promised, turning away and whispering to the uniformed man, "Get a doctor for her, just in case."

He walked into the ornate bedroom. A priest could be seen with his head far out the window and his knees tapping on the panel below it. Gilmore touched the priest on the back, and smiled briefly. Then he leaned out of the window.

"Come back, Barney," he said softly.

Barnett Cox—the man's name, as Gilmore had been told—stood on the ledge in the dimness with his hands tight against the brick wall. The mound of flesh that was his stomach quivered at the sound of the new voice.

Gilmore asked gently, "Can you come back, Barney? Are you able to move? If not, I'll help you. That's why I'm here."

"I—I won't waste my energy talking," Cox said.

"Hold on, Barney," Gilmore said, making the decision almost before he'd had time to think. "I'll bring you back. Wait for me. I'll be there very quickly, I promise."

A puddle of rainwater appeared on the floor when he took off his coat and hat. He was putting the contents of all his pockets on top of the coat and hat when the priest looked back in. The priest was a short, bald man with bright eyes.

"It's a case of adultery," the priest said surprisingly. "Cox was with this woman when her husband got home. The husband broke the woman's neck with one motion while Cox was scrambling to get away. He says that the sight of what he feels he let happen to the woman is intolerable to him and he can't live with the memory. But I think he'll be only too glad to keep on living if he can get back. If you can get him back."

"That's what I'm going out there to try to do," Gilmore said.

Rain bounced off the impassive buildings when Gilmore sat down on the ledge. He gripped the window frame and slowly stood up. The ledge didn't give his oversize feet more than three inches of play. When he touched the bricks, cement gritted under his fingernail nastily, like hot cereal suddenly gone cold. He squinted out through the screen of rain to make sure Cox was still out there.

"I'm coming for you," he called.

"You'll hold on to me and we'll both get back. If I can do it, you can."

All along this wide street, windows had been flung open. Gilmore could see them while he moved. Men and women looked out as they talked to other people or to each other. T.V. equipment had arrived. He could hear car horns and the call, "Hot dogs! Get your franks here."

Gilmore put out his left foot first, then brought his right foot next to it. Rainfall was sliding down his cheeks and along the back of his neck. When he took his third or fourth step with the left foot, the *pop* of a flashbulb turned the scene white for a split minute, almost throwing Gilmore off-balance by its suddenness.

But when he put his left foot down he had made progress towards Barnett Cox, rather than drawing it back because of the shock.

He saw Cox's face for the first time in that white flash. Cox had been looking towards Gilmore, and the fear in the man's face must have been the same as when he had seen his married mistress' neck broken with one motion.

Fear in the man's face urged Gilmore ahead. When he was five feet away from the man, Gilmore stopped. "You have to help yourself now," he said, purposely keeping his voice at a soothing pitch. "Get hold of my belt."

Cox said shakily, "If you make one wrong move, you can pull me down."

"I won't make a wrong move."

"You may think it's the right move for *you* to make, the only move you can make."

Gilmore said reasonably, "I came out here to help you, Cox. Nobody would want to do you any harm while you're out here. Be sensible, and let me do my job."

"I don't want to die," Cox said. "I saw what happened to Margaretta, and I got so upset I thought it was my fault—"

"Things are different now," Gilmore agreed soothingly. "Get hold of my belt and I'll bring you back. You'll be all right."

Cox's fingers went out and took firm hold of Gilmore's belt. As the pressure of the belt grew tighter across Gilmore's middle, he took care to seem as if he wasn't being inconvenienced by it at all. If Cox slackened his grip, he could very well become even more frightened and forget about his balance altogether.

Cox took a faltering step along with Gilmore, the first step he had taken. He said uselessly, "Be careful."

Gilmore was hugging brick with his left cheek as he moved. He guessed his cheek would be scratched bloody by the time he got back, and his clothes would be a soggy mess. It surprised him, too, that in a spot like this he

should find himself thinking about such things.

A flashbulb popped again from below, and Cox let out a scream because of it.

Below them the people suddenly grew quieter, as if each one were holding his or her breath at the same time.

Gilmore gasped in spite of himself at a wrench of pain at his side when he took another step. It was the kind of feeling his wife had described when she'd finally dragged him to a night club he'd had no desire to visit and the entertainment hadn't been any good.

During an argument about her lavishness with money not long before the final break between them, she had hurled a gift watch at him ("M.G. to D.G.", it had been inscribed), and when it struck him on the side the brief pain had almost been like the one he was feeling now.

Damn it, he was thinking about private matters again at a time like this!

The window was now less than two feet away. As Barnett Cox swayed dizzily Gilmore took a wide quick step that brought him to the middle of the window. Cox seemed frightened by the sudden change of pace, and Gilmore reached back to help steady him. It took time, and he could feel the man's chest through his wet clothes, and his racing heartbeats.

Gilmore purposely took a step past the window, permitting Cox to get there first. The priest reached out a steadying hand to Cox. Gilmore held the man's other hand as Cox was helped inside. Not till the pressure on Gilmore's hand had eased up did the police officer come inside, too.

Cox was swaying back and forth on his feet when Gilmore finally got inside, and staring wild-eyed at the man who had saved him. Gilmore would have smiled if there had been a smile left in his system.

"The job's over," he said, walking to the bed and picking up the wallet with the shining gray shield pinned to it on the inside. He gestured towards the uniformed policemen. "You'd better take this; the pin might be a weapon for me."

"Sergeant?" The policeman looked stunned. "I don't quite understand?"

"I was going to give myself up earlier tonight, but this emergency call came in before I could do it; and a career man on the force doesn't throw away everything during an emergency."

Detective Sergeant Daniel Gilmore held the watch initialled 'M.G. to D.G.', then tossed it in the air and caught it. "Barnett Cox will be able to confirm that an hour ago tonight I killed my wife," he said.

IF I SHOULD DIE



BEFORE I WAKE

A dangerous psychopath can very easily underestimate the courage and ingenuity of a small boy . . . particularly when there are police officer traditions to uphold in a badge-wearing family.

A FOUR AND A HALF STAR SUSPENSE THRILLER

by CORNELL WOOLRICH



THE LITTLE GIRL that had the desk in front of mine in 5-A was named Millie Adams. I don't remember much about her, because I was only nine then, not going-on-twelve like I am now. I only remember about those three lollipops—the two she got and the one she never got—and how we never saw her again after that. Me and all the fellows used to tease her a lot.

Afterwards when it was too late—I wished we hadn't. We didn't tease her because we had anything against her, but just because she was a girl. She had two pigtails hanging down her back. I had a lot

of fun dipping them in my inkwell and sticking chewing-gum on them. I got kept in plenty for it too.

I used to follow her around the school yard at noon recess pulling them and saying "Ding ding!" like they were bells.

Millie used to say, "Tommy Lee, I'm going to tell a policeman on you!"

"Yah!" I hooted. "My father's a third grade detective. That's better than any policeman!"

"Well, then, I'll tell a second grade detective. That's better than a third grade one!"

That stumped me, so I went

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home and asked my father about it that night. He looked over at my mother, a little uncomfortably. She was the one who answered, before he did.

"Not better," she told me, "just a little smarter. Your father'll be one, Tommy, about the time he's fifty."

He squirmed, kind of, but he didn't say anything.

I said, "I'm going to be one too when I grow up."

Mother said, "God forbid!" but she seemed to be talking to my father more than me. "Never home on time for meals. Called out in the dead of night. Risking your life. Your wife never knowing when you'll be carried back on a stretcher—or not at all. And for what? A picayune pension when you've given your youth and strength, and are no good to them any more!"

It sounded swell to me. He sort of smiled. "My father was one before me," he said. "And I can remember my mother saying the same thing when I was Tommy's age. You can't stop him. You may as well get used to the idea. It's in the blood."

"Yes? Well, it's going to come out of the blood, if I've got to use the back of a hair-brush to drive it out!"

Millie Adams, on account of the way us fellows had teased her, got in the habit of eating her lunch in the classroom instead of coming out in the yard.

One day when I was getting ready to go out with mine, she opened her lunch box and I saw this peachy green lollipop stuck in it. One of the kind that cost a dime apiece, too; not just three cents. And green is lime, my favorite flavor. So I hung around and tried to make up with her.

"Let's be friends," I said. "Where'd you get that?"

"Someone gave it to me," she said. "It's a secret." girls always try to tell you that any time you ask 'em anything.

I knew better than to believe her. She never had any nickels or dimes for candy, and Mr. Beidermann down at the candy store wouldn't even trust us for one of the three penny kind, much less a ten-cent one like this with wax paper on it.

"I bet you swiped it!" I said.

"I did not!" she flared. "A man gave it to me, I tell you! An awful nice man. He was standing on the corner when I was coming to school this morning. He called me over and took it out of his pocket and said, 'Here, little girl, you want some candy?' He said I was the prettiest little girl went by the whole time he was standing—"

Millie covered her mouth with her hand. "O-oh, I forgot! He told me not to tell anybody. He said he wouldn't gimme any more if I told anybody."

"Gimme a lick," I said, "and I won't tell anybody."

"Cross your heart and swear?"

I would have promised anything to get at it. My mouth was practically dripping across her shoulder from in back. So I crossed my heart and swore. Once you do that, you can't ever tell—especially if your father's a third grade detective like mine.

You're not like other fellows. You can't ever break your word, not even to a dumb thing like a girl. If you do, you're a double-crosser. Father told me that and everything he says is true.

The next day when she opened her lunch box at noon, there was an orange one in it. And orange is my favorite flavor too. I was right here on the job, believe me. We shared it lick and lick alike.

"He's an awful nice man," she said. "He's got big eyes like a saucer and they keep looking all around. He's going to give me another one tomorrow. A cinnamon one."

Cinnamon is my favorite flavor too. "Bet he forgets," I said.

"He said if he does, I should remind him, and I can go with him and get it myself. I can take as many as I want. He's got a big house off in the woods, all full of lollipops and gumdrops and chalk-lit bars, and I can bring back as much as I want."

"Then why didn't you?" I jeered.

As though any kid in their right mind would turn down a swell

chance like that! I knew she was just making the whole thing up to sound important and show off.

"Because it was one minute to nine and the bell was ringing already. Think I wanna be late and spoil my record? But tomorrow I'm gonna leave the house early, so I'll have lots of time."

When we got out at three I steered clear of her, because I didn't want the other fellows to think I was a sissy. But she came up to me just as I was beginning a game of catch-ball with Eddie Riley and yanked my sleeve. We were about a block away, all going home in a crowd.

"Look!" she whispered. "There's that man I told you gave me the lollipops. See him standing down there under that awning? Now do you believe me?"

I looked but there wasn't anything wonderful to see. Just a man in slouchy old clothes, with great big long arms like chimpanzees have nearly hanging down to his knees. The blue shade from the awning came down over his face and shoulders, but you could see his eyes glistening through it.

He had a shiny jackknife in his hand and he was cutting a callus on his finger, and looking all around him like he didn't want anybody to see what he was doing.

I was ashamed to let Eddie Riley see me talking to a girl, so I shoved her away. She didn't have any lollipop left, anyway.



"Aw, who cares?" I growled. "Throw me a curve, Eddie!"

Eddie muffed a couple of my throws, because he was going backwards, on our way home, and while he ran after the ball to pick it up, I had time to look around.

Millie and the man were walking down the side street holding hands with each other. But then all of a sudden he turned around and walked the other way in a hurry, and went around the corner without her like he forgot something.

Mr. Murphy, the traffic cop, came up the side street just then, on his way to stand in front of the school and direct traffic like he always did when we kids were let out. That was all.

Next day Millie finally broke her record. She didn't come to school all day.

II

I WAS KIND of hopeful that maybe she'd come the day after with all that candy, like she said, and share it with me. But the day after her desk stayed empty too.

The principal came in just before three, and we saw two men in gray suits that looked like truant officers standing outside in the hall. We all got kind of scared at first, but it wasn't anything. They weren't after any of us for breaking windows or anything. The principal just wanted to know if anybody present had seen Millie Adams on the way to school day before yesterday.

One girl raised her hand and said she'd called for Millie. But Millie had left the house extra-early, quarter past eight, so she'd missed her.

I was going to tell them what she told me, about that house full of candy in the woods. But I remembered I'd sworn and crossed my heart, and my father was a third grade detective, so how could I? I knew it was all just fibs anyway, and they'd just laugh at me or make me stand in the corner.

We never saw Millie again. One day about three months after, Miss Hammer's eyes were all red and wet, like she'd been crying just before the bell rang. She was our teacher. And from then on, my father wasn't home for nearly a week straight. He'd just come in late at night once in a while, for a shower, and go right out again.

One night through the door, I heard him saying something about "an escaped psycho." But I've never been quite sure what that word meant.

"If we only had some kind of a lead," he said. "Any kind of description at all to go by, no matter how sketchy! If we don't get him, you know, it'll only happen over again. It always does!"

I got out of bed and I went out to him. I said, "But, if a guy gives his word not to tell something, and his father's a third grade detective, can't he ever break his word?"

"No," he said. "Never! Only stool-pigeons tell, and welschers."

"One in the family's enough," my mother said sharply. "That'll be all of that!" She reached for her slipper, so I beat it.

Sometimes when he came home like that, that week, he brought papers with him. But when I'd find them the next day, the front page was always torn off, like it had somebody's picture on it I wasn't supposed to see. But I only went for the comic strips anyway. Then, after about a week, they were left whole again like before, and he started coming home for supper again.

Pretty soon all of us kids in school forgot all about Millie Adams.

I got promoted in the Fall, and in the Spring again, and in the Fall and in the Spring. I couldn't get anything higher than C's in proficiency and C-minuses in conduct.

But as long as I made it and didn't get left behind, my father would just shove my head with his hand and say, "That's all right,

Tommy, you'll make a good detective anyway. You're a chip off the old block."

Only he always said it when my mother wasn't around. Oh, I nearly forgot! He got made a second grade detective when he was only thirty-five yet, and not fifty like she said. She got kind of red when he reminded her, I noticed.

I was lucky all through 5B and 6A and 6B. I didn't have a girl sitting in front of me again until 7A. She was a new girl, transferred from another school. Her name was Beanie Myers. She always wore a white middy blouse, and she had a bunch of brown curls hanging down her back.

I liked her from the start, because she got very good marks. The way the work kept getting tougher all the time, it came in handy the way she let me look over her shoulders and get all the right answers. Most girls are stingy that way, but she was just like a fellow.

So when the other fellows started to tease her, I punched one of them in the nose and made them quit after that. But then she had to come up to me in front of the whole crowd and say, "Tommy Lee, I think you're awful wonderful!" I didn't like that much, you bet.

But outside of divvying her answers up, she was just as dumb as other girls. She had one baby habit. She was crazy about colored

chalk. She was always carrying it around with her, and whenever you saw pink or yellow streaks on a fence or the side of a house, you knew Jeanie Myers had passed that way. She just couldn't resist marking up everything in reach. She couldn't seem to go by anywhere without drawing a long track after her on a wall or sidewalk.

We fellows used lots of chalk too, but the plain white kind, and we used it for something useful like a baseball score or a game of prisoner's base, not just making wavy lines along fences. She didn't even know she was doing it half the time. She just walked along with her hand out tracing chalk-marks without looking.

Buying it all the time kept her pretty broke; that colored kind comes to a quarter a box, and sometimes she bought as many as two boxes a week. So she hardly ever had any money left over for candy. That was why I was so surprised when I saw her unwrapping the wax paper off this ten-cent lollipop one day at recess.

It was green. Lime is my favorite flavor, too.

"Yesterday afternoon," I accused her, "you wouldn't lend me a penny for caramels, then you go and buy a whole dime lollipop, you piker."

"I did not!" she said. "A man gave it to me on the way to school this morning."

"Aw, since when do grown-ups hand out candy free to us kids like that?" I wanted to know.

"He did so! He's in the candy business, that's why! He's got a great big warehouse or somep'n full of it. I can have all I want for nothing, free. All I have to do is go there and help myself."

For a minute I had a funny feeling like somebody I once knew long ago had been given a green lollipop like that, and I tried hard to remember who, but I couldn't. It wasn't last week, or the week before, or last month. It wasn't even last year, and I could hardly remember back that far anyway, so I had to give up trying.

After she licked it down halfway, she split it with me. She was very nice that way, Jeanie.

"Don't let on what I told you to any of the other kids," she said, "or they'll want to get in on it too."

Next day when the bunch was all piling out into the yard at recess, she turned and whispered over her shoulder to me: "Stay in! I've got another one."

She kept the lid of her box down until they were all gone, then tipped it and showed me. It was orange, and orange is my favorite flavor. I shoved in on the seat next to her and we got to work between us. *Slup, slup, slup, here it's your turn now.*

I screwed up my face and kept staring at the blackboard, which was all empty. I kept trying to re-

member something about an orange lollipop too. First green, then orange. It was like I'd done all this before.

"Boy, am I having fun this week!" Jeanie raved between licks. "Every day a free lollipop for a treat. He's an awful nice man, whoever he is. Tomorrow what kind do you think I'm going to get? Cinnamon!"

Without knowing how it happened, I wasn't thinking about lollipops any more. I had an awful empty feeling, like I had to tell I didn't know who, and I didn't know what I had to tell, so how could I?

And then the one o'clock bell rang, and it was too late.

III

I HAD AN awful bad dream that night, about a lot of old newspapers lying on the ground out in the woods somewhere, and they all had their front pages torn off. Then when I picked them up and looked under them, somebody's whole arm was sticking up out of the ground, stiff and dead, and the hand part was holding onto a bright red cinnamon lollipop.

Boy, it scared me! I woke up and pulled the covers all the way over my head.

My mother had to call me three times next day, I was so sleepy, and I just about made school by the skin of my teeth. I just landed

in my seat as the bell quit ringing, and Old Battle-Ax Flagg gave me a dirty look, but she couldn't do anything about it.

When I got my breath back, I looked up and something looked different about the room. I could see Eddie Riley's head and shoul-



ders up two seats ahead with no one in the way. Then I saw right away that was because Jeanie's desk was empty. And she was always in ahead of me. She'd never been late before.

Something had happened.

Flagg called on me right away, and I was kept too busy to think about anything but what the square root of some blame thing was. Then at ten after, Jeanie and another girl named Emma Nolan came in together.

When the period was over Old Hatchet-Face Flagg said, "Jeanie, you're staying in this afternoon for being late. Emma, I'll overlook it this time, because I know your mother's sick this week and you have to help around the house."

It was the first time Jeanie had

ever been kept in like that, and I felt kind of sorry for her.

At noon she took a red cinnamon lollipop out of her lunch box. She was boiling.

"I'd had a million of 'em if I hadn't run into that Emma," she complained. "We were on our way over to where he keeps his candy supply. It would of only taken a minute, and then she had to come along and spoil everything. He went off and left me! Now I can't go this afternoon either on account of being kept in!"

I wanted to be extra-special nice to her—we were going to have an exam next day and her answers would come in handy—so I said, "I'll wait for you outside, huh, Jeanie?" when the bell rang at three, and everybody but her got up to beat it.

I hung around playing ball with myself, throwing curves up into the air and running under them to catch them when they came down, and it sort of carried me down a ways without noticing it, until I was nearly two blocks away from the school. Then I missed one and I had to run after it, and it wound up in front of somebody's feet standing under an awning on the sidewalk.

I bent down and got it, and then I looked up and there was a man standing there very still in front of me, in the blue shadows under the awning. He had big stary eyes and long arms like them chimps at the

zoo, and he was doing something with his fingers, bending them in and out like he wanted to get hold of something with them.

He didn't pay much attention to me. I guess he wasn't interested in little boys. I looked at his face for a minute, and I had a feeling I'd seen it before some place. Especially them big saucer-like eyes. I backed away and went on playing ball, and he just stayed there where he was, without moving, except only his fingers like I told you.

I threw an extra high one, way up, and while I was staring straight up and watching it, all of a sudden a name seemed to come down and hit me out of the blue sky. *Millie Adams.*

Now I knew where I'd seen those funny eyes before, and now I knew who'd shared a green and an orange lollipop with me. He'd given them to her—and then she never came back to school any more. Now I knew what I wanted to tell Jeanie—not to go near him, because something would happen to her. I didn't know what, but something.

I got so scared I quit playing ball and I ran all the way back to school and went in the yard, which we weren't allowed to do after hours. I sneaked up outside the window and looked in.

She was still sitting there at her desk doing her homework, and Miss Flagg was up front correct-ing papers. So I started to tap as

light as I could on the pane, to get Jeanie to turn around and look at me. She did, but then right while I was making signs to her, Flagg looked up and caught us, and she made me come inside.

"Well, Thomas," she said, sour as a lemon, "since you seem unable to tear yourself away from the classroom, suppose you sit down and go to work. No, not behind Jeanie—on the other side of the room, please!"

Then, after a couple minutes, just to make things worse, she said, "You may go now, Jeanie. You've stayed long enough. Tomorrow see that you get here on time."

But then when she saw me getting ready to get up and go with her, she snapped, "Not you, young man! Stay right where you are."

I couldn't hold back any more. I hollered out at her, "No! Miss Flagg, don't let her go! You can't! Make her stay in! She's going after some candy and—!"

She got riled as blazes and banged her hand down on her desk. "Here, here," she yapped. "That'll be all of that! Not another word out of you! Every time you open your mouth, I'm keeping you in another half-hour!"

I saw Jeanie gathering up her books and starting for the door, and I couldn't stand it. "Jeanie," I yelled at her. "Don't go out there! Wait for me outside in the yard!"

Miss Flagg got up and came down the aisle and stood over me.

"Do you want me to send for the principal?" she asked. "I'll have you put back to Six-B if you make another sound! I'll have you expelled for insubordination!"

I never saw her get so sore before.

Jeanie was sore too—at me. "Snitcher! Tattle-tale!" she said under her breath, and closed the door after her.

I saw her go past the window outside, and then I didn't see her any more. She'd left the grounds.

I did my best to try and tell Miss Flagg, but she wouldn't let me talk. And I was half bawling, and so excited I could hardly talk straight anyhow.

"She's going to get some lollipops and she's never coming back, and then the front pages of the papers are all going to be torn off and—!"

I was sobbing so hard I don't think she heard half I said. Her face was like stone, and she was writing a note to my father.

I yelled, "Like Millie Adams—and you done it, you done it!"

She hadn't been on the staff when that happened to Millie Adams, so she didn't know what I meant. And she kept giving me another half hour and another half hour, until finally it was six.

I was licked and I knew it, and I just had to sit there mum, while the sun went down outside and purple shadows piled up in the school yard, and finally it was all

dark and she put on the electric lights. Even then she wouldn't let me go, until the minute of six.

Then she made me take a note home with me, and when I rushed out and didn't close the door, she made me come back and do it over again.

When I finally got out for good and all, the streets around the school were dark and empty, just a bleary arc-light shining down on the corner, and when I passed where that awning was, it had been folded up for the night and there wasn't anyone standing there any more. Something funny went up and down my back, like when a cat's fur goes the wrong way, as I went by there.

IV

INSTEAD OF going home, I went to Jeanie's house first, which was off in another direction, and hung around outside trying to look in the windows and see if she was in there. They were all lit up and I saw her mother and her kid sister, but not her. Her mother kept coming to the window and looking out, and that's how she saw me.

Then she came out to the door and said, "Tommy, have you seen Jeanie? She should have been in long ago. I think she went over to Emma's house. If you see her, will you tell her to come right straight home? It's after six, and I don't like her staying out this late."

I felt sort of sick and scared, and I didn't have the nerve to tell her. I backed off the porch, and I said, "Yes ma'am," and I ran like anything.

Emma lived awfully far out, and she wasn't there. I knew she wouldn't be anyway, but I went to see, because Emma's family didn't have a phone. Emma came to the door chewing bread and said Jeanie never showed up at her house after she got let out. I didn't know where else to go but home then.

I would have been scared to go there at all any other night but this. It was after seven already and was I in trouble! Just that night my father had to be home early, and supper was all over, and he was sore at me for being late. And I guess they'd both been kind of scared and they took that out on me, too.

I couldn't get a word in about Jeanie. I no sooner opened up about being kept in, which was only the first part of what I wanted to tell him, than he whacked me and told me to go to my room and stay there. Then while I was still trying to tell him, he saw the note Miss Flagg wrote, and after he read that, that finished it. I couldn't get a word in sideways, he was making so much noise. He locked the door on me from the outside, and there I was.

Nobody seemed to know but me, and nobody would listen to me

or believe me or try to help me. Not Miss Flagg, nor Jeanie's mother, nor even my own father, who I thought was such a regular guy. Now it was probably too late. I sat there on the edge of my bed in the dark and held my head.

I heard our phone ringing through the door, and he quit ranting long enough to answer it. Then I heard my mother say, "Oh Tom, no—not again!" in a scared voice.

"What else could it be?" he said. "The Chief just said they found her school books lying there in an alley. I told you it would happen again, if we didn't catch up with him the first time."

He meant Jeanie! I knew he meant Jeanie!

I jumped up and started to wangle the doorknob like sixty, and holler, "Dad, lemme out a minute! I can tell you what he looks like! I saw him this afternoon! I saw him with my own eyes!"

But the front door banged before I got halfway through, and they'd both gone out without listening to me. I guess my mother must have gone over to stay with Mrs. Myers a while and try to buck her up. I kept up my racketing, but no one answered.

I didn't know what to do then. I sat back on the bed and held my head some more. I thought, "How they ever gonna get him, if they don't know what he looks like? I do, and they won't gimme a chance to tell them. I got to stay here shut

up, when I'm the only one knows!"

Thinking about Jeanie made me feel shivery even where I was, right in my own house. I wondered what a man like that would do to her. Something pretty terrible, because they hardly ever called my Dad up like that after he went off duty, and they had tonight.

I got up and went over to the window, and stuck my hands in my pockets and stood looking out. Gee, it was dark out! The street looked so scary and lonely, with just a pale arc-light way down by the corner. I thought of Jeanie out there some place, with something awful happening to her and nobody around to help her.

I took my hands out of my pockets and some of the junk I always carried around with me spilled out after them. Marbles and nails and a hunk of chalk.

I stood looking at the chalk for a minute and—

I threw up the window and climbed across and got out onto the porch shed. It slanted down, but I braked against the slates. We lived upstairs in a two-family house. Maybe a grown-up would have had a hard time shinnying down the porch-post to the ground, but it was a cinch for me.

I beat it off the block in a hurry, in case my mother should come back. I knew my father wouldn't. He stayed out whole days at a time when they sent for him like this. After I got past the street that

went down Jeanie's way, I wasn't worried about being spotted any more.

I went the same way I did every morning on the way to school—only I'd never gone to school at night like this before. But I didn't go all the way. I stopped two blocks away where that rolled-up awning was. Everything looked different from what it did in the daytime, the school black and the sky black and no kids around at all—only me.

I said to myself, "She bought a new box of chalk day before yesterday, because I saw a full-length stick in her hand when we got out at three." But it didn't last long, the way she wore it away against everything in sight. Suppose she didn't have any left—by today?

I went around the corner from where the awning was, and I started looking along the walls. There wasn't anything on them, but they weren't any good for chalking anyway. They were mostly glass storefronts and doorways. I went down the whole block and I couldn't see a mark.

I said to myself, "Maybe she was walking on the outside, where there's nothing but air."

That would explain it.

I got all the way to the next corner, and I was going to turn around and go back, when I saw a hydrant out on the edge of the curb and it had a pink chalk gash across the hub. Jeanie—this after-

noon! Because her house was up the other way. She never passed here on her way home other days.

I got all steamed up and I said, "I knew it would work! I bet I follow her! I bet I find her!" And for a little while I even forgot to be afraid. It was like that game we kids play, Hare and Hounds.

I ran across the gutter and went along the next block. There was still too much glass, which is no good for chalk, but there was an ash can sticking out that must have been there all day without being taken in. It had a wavy pink line around its ridges.

I kept looking, hard.

Next block didn't have anything, and there was a peach of a brick wall along it too, perfect for chalking. She wouldn't have passed that up, no sir! So I crossed over to the other side of the way, and she and he must have too, because there was a lamppost there and that had just a short little dab. It was skinny, there wasn't much room, and she just took a peck at it for good luck as they went by.

Next block had something, and next, and then all of a sudden it quit. I went ahead looking, then had to come back again to where they ended. Did her chalk give out here, maybe? Did he catch her doing it and make her throw it away?

Not Jeanie—you couldn't get her to part with a piece of chalk for love or money. And he wouldn't get rough with her, because this



was Allen Avenue, and in the daytime there was lots of people around, even if there was no one around now.

I turned off to my left—I know my left because your heart's always on it—and I went down that way. It wasn't as nice here as our part of town any more; a great big gas works, and old tumbled-down houses, and dark alleys and things.

But the chalking was swell. That was the trouble. There was too much of it. Nearly every wall and vacant space was crawling with it, and some of it was words you get your mouth washed out with soap for saying.

But it was all white chalk luckily. The colored kind costs too much, so I knew it wasn't Jeanie's. Then when I saw where a sudden bright yellow streak started up and went on and on, with just breaks where there were doors and windows, I knew I'd found her again. She'd run out of pink around the corner and started in on a yellow stick, that was all.

V

IT WAS SO easy to follow, on account of being a thick hunk she

was holding, that I started to run instead of just walking, to catch up quicker. I shouldn't have. All of a sudden without any warning a skinny little bit of an alleyway opened up alongside of me, and there was a whole lot of men standing around in it.

A car was fronted up to the curb with its lights shining smack into it. But what scared me worst about the whole thing was that one of those men was my own father. He was standing right in the middle of all of them!

Did I jump back quick! He had his back to me luckily, and didn't see me. I heard him saying, ". . . here some place. Well, the quicker we start a house-to-house search, the better, boys."

One of them was holding one of our arithmetics like we use in school, with our names and grades on the inside of the cover.

Was it Jeanie's?

I ducked around the back of the car, keeping out of the light, and got across to the other side of the alley. The yellow line went right on from there uninterrupted, about me and Jeanie's reach from the ground.

I was dying to step up and tell him, "Dad, if you'll only follow this line, it'll take you to her. I know it will! But I didn't have the nerve. I knew what I'd get for being caught out on the streets that late without permission, especially after he left me locked up at home.

He'd probably whale the daylights out of me right in front of the whole bunch of them.

So I went off by myself into the dark, away from them all, and kept following the line on my own hook, and I guess they never even knew I passed there.

I couldn't understand why she'd throw her own books away into an alley like that. She knew better than to do that to school property of her own accord. And she was still all right up to here. Nothing had happened to her yet, or she wouldn't have kept on tracing this line.

The only thing I could make out was the man must have been carrying them for her, pretending he didn't want her to get tired, and he tossed them in there without her noticing, figuring she wasn't going to need them any more.

But they did go on farther, lots farther—so I guess she never noticed he got rid of her books for her. All of a sudden vacant lots began showing up, and then there was one last house, and then the houses quit and it was the edge of town. Open fields started in from here on. The road kept going, but without any sidewalks any more.

Car lights were a help.

I'd never been this far out before, not even in the daytime, and I was stumped for sure now. There wasn't anything left to chalk up any more. But the yellow streak had run right smack up to the very

edge of the end house, and then run off into thin air, so they must have kept pointed straight ahead.

I did too, but I sure wasn't keen on it. I had to walk in the dirt and stones along the side of the road, and jump back sometimes when cars came speeding by, so I wouldn't get hit.

Way up ahead—it seemed like a mile off—there was a row of bill-boards. It took me a long time to get up to them, but when I did I was glad I kept going, because the lower supports—the picture part was way up over my head—had little yellow strokes on them. So she'd still been holding onto her chalk even this far out.

It must have been lonely out here even in the afternoon, and now it was terrible. Just this gray road in the darkness, with black fields all around, and high grass sighing in the wind. The road had lights on telegraph poles, but they were awfully far apart. And you felt worse after you left each one behind than you did before you came up to it.

She'd stroked them, though; they must have been walking off-side like I was. Maybe he'd been afraid to ask for a lift while he had her with him.

I looked back, and the lights of the city were so far behind me I couldn't see them any more, just a haze in the sky over where they were. Gee, I wanted to turn around and go back, bad! But I kept

thinking, "If I was in poor Jeanie's shoes, I wouldn't want the only fellow that knows where I am, to give up and go back!"

So I didn't.

There was worse coming up ahead, too. I tried to ignore it as long as I could, because I knew what it was, and I didn't like the idea very much either. Something even blacker than the rest of the blackness had been slowly coming nearer for a long time. Like a big black wall where the fields ended, and the nearer I got the taller it got, until it was 'way up over me. The woods!

Finally they got up to me and closed in around me on both sides. I took one last long look back, toward where my father and those men were, so far behind me. Then I took a deep breath and held it, and kept moving, and I was in!

The road kept going right on through, and even the lights kept up far apart, so at first it wasn't as bad as I thought it was going to be. I was careful not to look anywhere but straight ahead. I might have seen something I didn't want to. I was just as scared now to turn back as to go ahead. That's why I kept going ahead.

When I got up to the next light pole, she'd passed it too. But when I got to the one after that—she hadn't. They'd turned off somewhere in between the two. I thought, "Does this mean I have to go in among those trees and

things, with him maybe behind one of 'em waiting to jump me?"

Boy, I sure felt little and lonely and scared. It was like dying a little to go in there. If I'd only had even just Eddie Riley along with me, or anyone at all, it wouldn't have been so bad.

I probably would have hung around there all night trying to make up my mind, when something did it for me all of a sudden. A roaring sound came heading toward me through the woods, and before there was even enough time to get scared, a pair of bright white headlights came shooting down the road at me, with a car behind them headed in to town a mile a minute.

I only just had time to jump out of the way to keep from getting hit, it was rushing along so fast.

The brakes squawked and screeched and it stopped somewhere down the road out of sight, beyond the light. I ducked behind a tree, listening, and I heard a lady's voice say, "I'm telling you it wasn't an animal! I distinctly saw his face! Now what's a child doing alone in the woods at this hour of the night? Go back and see if you can find him, Frank!"

I heard the door open and a man got out and came back toward me calling, "Little boy! Sonny! Come here, we won't hurt you!"

Gee, I wanted awful bad to run out to him and say, "Take me in with you, will you please, mister?"

I turned and beat it away when he got too near, afraid he'd catch me and keep me from trying to find Jeanie or something. And that's how I got in the woods. I stopped again, in farther, and held my breath, so he wouldn't follow me by the noise I was making. I heard the car start up again, and caught a red wink from its tail, 'way off between the trees, and then it was gone and I was alone in the woods.

Once you were in under 'em, the trees weren't as thick-together as they looked from the outside. It was bad enough, but at least it wasn't like a jungle or something you read about in books.

About five minutes after I first went in, something funny started to happen. The tops of the trees all lit up red, like there was a fire around, and some of it got through down to the ground where I was. But then when it started to change to white little by little, I caught on it was a late moon coming up full. In one way, it didn't make it any better for me; it made it worse than before.

I could see my way better, but I could also see lots of spooky shadows and things that I couldn't before when it was all evenly dark. This way I saw too much.

I went roaming on, knowing I might lose the road for good and all, but too tired and scared already to care much if I did. Every once in a while I'd think I'd see

something move, and I'd run—away from it, don't worry.

It was while I was sprinting like that, across a sort of open place pale with moonlight, that my foot caught over something and I took a full-length fall, and there was a clatter that nearly busted my heart in two.

It was Jeanie's tin lunch box, lying there on the ground.

She'd carried it all this way, thinking she was going to fill it up with candy. So now I knew I'd finally hit the place where she caught on, got frightened, and quit going any more of her own accord. He must have kept her attention, to keep her from noticing how far into the woods he was bringing her. But here was where she finally tumbled something was wrong.

There were other things there beside the lunch box. I had to look a little, but I found them in the moonlight. Two brand new pieces of chalk that hadn't been used yet, but that somebody had stepped on and broken when they fell.

And I also found the black sailor-tie that she always wore around her middy-blouses. The bow was still in it, but it was torn in half, like he'd caught her by it when she tried to run away.

VI

AHEAD, LIKE looking through a long black tunnel, there was another open patch of moonlight. I

ran on toward it, because I was too scared to stay there with that lunch box and those other things any more.

When I got to it and looked, somehow I knew it was the place. It was the place, all right. There wasn't a sound, and nothing was stirring, but it was the place. It kind of—seemed to be waiting.

It was a much bigger clearing than the last. There was a crazy old decayed house standing right in the middle of it. It didn't have any glass in the windows, and you could tell no one had lived in it in a long time. Maybe it had once been a small farm or something, and it had been given up. There were trees in front, and bigger trees behind them. It just sat there in the moonlight, kind of waiting, as if to say, "Come on in, little boy," and then—*snap*.

I circled all the way around it first, without coming out from between the trees. I dodged behind them from one to the other, and it felt like someone was watching me the whole time from those black holes of windows, waiting for me to come nearer.

Finally I got up my nerve and stole out into the open, on the side where the shadow of the house fell, and there was no moonlight to give me away. I got up close under one of the yawning windows and listened. I couldn't hear anything, but that was because my heart was thumping so hard.

I whispered very low, "Jeanie, are you in there?" and then I nearly dropped dead, but nothing happened.

I was afraid to go around by the door, because that was the side where all the moonlight was, and I knew that warped porch would creak if I tried to cross it. So I finally reached up and caught the window ledge I was under with both hands and chinned myself slowly up, without scraping my feet against the weather-beaten old clapboards.

I'm a good chinner in school. But when my eyes came up over the sill, it was all black inside. I couldn't see a thing. I let myself down to rest, and I thought of a test to find out if it was okay to go in there or not.

I picked up a handful of gravel and tossed it in, and heard it light all over the floor inside like rain. I crouched, ready to sprint back to the trees, but nothing moved, nothing happened.

The house just seemed to keep on waiting. So I got up my courage and chinned myself up again, and this time I stuck my legs across the sill and got in.

I waited for hands to grab me, out of the dark, but they didn't, and after I was in a little while I could see moonlight reflected in the front part of the house and that sort of guided me. I went toward it through an opening in the wall where there wasn't any door left

any more, and came out into a hall. It was bright as milk out there, with moonlight spilling through the open door in front and the busted fanlight above it. Off to one side there were rickety stairs going up into the dark.

I put my hand on the post at the bottom of them and waited for more nerve to work itself up. When it had, I started inching up them, waiting on each step before I took the next. Every time they squeaked, I got off that place and moved to another. One time the whole thing snapped, like a log in a fire, and I waited a whole five minutes with my tongue hanging out, but still nothing happened.

When I was finally up on the top landing, there was a closed door off to one side of me. It wasn't missing like the ones downstairs. I put my hands against it, sucked in my breath, and started easing it open. If there'd been anyone in there, I kept reassuring myself, they would have heard me long before now. I finally got it back far enough to look in around the edge of it.

This room was on the moon side, but it had its shutters closed over windows with no glass left in them. Only crazy little criss-cross chinks of light came through the slate. I whispered, "Jeanie, are you in here?"

I only had nerve enough to do that once in each room. But this time somebody sort of coughed. I

had to grab my mouth with both hands to keep from shouting. I got all wet like it was summertime, but I was all cold like it was winter.

Before I could get my head back out of the door, the cough came again. It was such a little bit of a sound, like a baby choking, that I hung onto the door frame with both hands and managed to keep from bolting for the stairs. It almost sounded like a weak cough for help, if there is such a thing.

I could make out a lot of lumps on the floor, a pile of old burlap sacks or something strewn around. I said "Jeanie" a little louder than I'd yet spoken, and to my horror they started to wave a little. I didn't know what was coming out of them, rats or snakes or—I hung on tight so as not to give ground.

What did come out of them was two feet. Little feet, a kid's feet, tied together. One was black with a stocking on it, one was white because the stocking had fallen down.

I wasn't afraid now. I knew. I jumped over and pulled all the empty sacks off, and I could see her white middy blouse in the dark. I felt for her face, and the reason she could only cough was her mouth had a rag tied across it.

I took a terrible chance and scraped one of the matches from my pocket along the floor. I could have opened the shutters, but that would have taken longer. The match showed there wasn't anybody else but us in the room. Her

eyes were shining, but it was all black around them where the tears had been running down her cheeks for hours steady. I took a good look at the knot on the gag and then I put the match out. I needed both hands.

I got it off easy. I'm good at knots. He'd tied the cords around her hands and feet good and tight, but my fingers were smaller than his. I could get them in places he couldn't. Even so it seemed to take ages, and I kept expecting to feel somebody grab the back of my neck any minute.

I slipped my arm under her and helped her to sit up. She cried a little more just from habit, because she'd been crying so long already.

"Where'd he go?" was the first thing I whispered.

She quit crying long enough to let some voice through. "I——don't know," she whispered back.

"Has he been gone long?"

"When the m-moon came up."

"Did he go out of the house?"

"I think so. I heard his steps go 'way outside."

"Maybe he's gone for good," I breathed hopefully.

"No, he said he—he was just going to dig the hole. He said he was coming back and—do it then."

"Do what?"

"K-kill me with that knife he's got. He pulled a hair out of my head right in front of me and tried it on the knife to see if it was sharp enough."

VII

WE BOTH LOOKED all around us fearfully. "Let's get out of here," I said hurriedly. "Can you walk?"

"My legs are asleep." One of them gave under her when she tried to stand up and she nearly went down, but I caught her just in time.

"Hold onto me," I said.

We got out the door that way and to the head of the stairs. The moonlight down below in the hall looked wonderful—if we could only get down there and out where it was.

"Don't make any noise going down now," I cautioned. "He may be around out there some place."

We hobbled down them quietly and to the head of the stairs. The side close up against the wall, me feeling our way along it, she hugging me close. The circulation came back in her legs and it got easier for her to use them. We were only about a quarter of the way down from the top when it happened.

I think both of us shouldn't have stood on the same step at one time. That was it. Something banged like a gun, and the step split in the middle and went down like a V. My whole foot went in and through. The toe part got caught down below the split and I couldn't bring it back again.

We both worked like sixty, she with her hands and me with my

hands and feet both, trying to get it loose again. I couldn't, no matter how I turned it. The board had snapped part way back and it hurt something awful the way it squeezed. I couldn't even get down to my shoe and unlace it, or I would have tried pulling it out of that.

We had to quit finally. We got so tired out pulling and hauling at it. We both had to sit down together on the step above it—I could do that—and rest. And wait.

"Jeanie, go ahead," I kept begging her. "Get down there while you still can make it, and—and keep going straight over that way, with the moon behind you, until you get to the road—"

She hung onto me like glue with both hands and wouldn't budge. "No, no! I'm not going without you. If you have to stay, then I'm going to s-stay too. It wouldn't be fair, Tommy—"

We sat without saying anything for a while—just listening. Listening hard. Once in a while we tried to cheer each other up.

"Maybe he won't come back till daylight, and somebody else'll find us first."

But who would come to a forgotten house like this 'way out in the woods?

"Maybe he won't come back at all." But he hadn't gone to all the trouble of bringing her here just to leave her tied up, and we both knew it.

Once she asked, "Why do you suppose he did it? I never did anything to him."

I remembered something my father had said when that happened to Millie Adams that time. "He's an escaped psy—psycho or something."

"What do they do to you?" she wanted to know.

I wasn't sure. I only knew they found them out in the woods under old newspapers long afterwards. But I couldn't tell her that, because she was only a girl.

"I—I guess they like to scare you and tease you lots."

"He did already," she shivered. "He kept drinking out of a bottle and singing loud without any tune, and then he'd make me feel how sharp that knife was, and he cut off one of my curls and waved it around on his finger."

Something crunched outside the house like the stones, and our arms grabbed each other so tight we were just like one kid instead of two.

"Quick, Jeanie! Run!" I told her, giving her arm a squeeze. She couldn't even whisper, she was so scared. All she could do was shake her head.

There weren't any more crunches for a minute, and we thought of everything we could that would help and said it into each other's ears.

"Maybe it was just something fell down off a tree."

"Maybe he won't come in, maybe he'll stay out there."

We both saw the shadow at the same time, and gave a heave together. It was in the middle of all the white moonlight on the floor down below, like someone was standing close up against the front doorway listening. It didn't move at first. Just stayed still, a big black head and shoulders.

We lay back flat against the slope of the stairs and tried to get in as close as we could against the wall where it was darker. But my foot wouldn't let me move much from where I was, and her middy blouse was so white.

The black shadow was moving now. It was coming further in. It was spreading across the moonlight like ink on a blotter. It got longer and longer and longer, and grew a pair of long legs like a man on stilts. He was down there below us in the hall now.

I breathed into her ear, "Hide your face against me. Don't look at him! Maybe he won't see us."

She turned her face around the other way like I said, and I went on looking through her hair.

The stairs shook a little. He must have put his foot on them. Then he put his other foot down, and they shook some more. He came up like a cat, hardly making any sound at all with his feet. But we could hear his breathing plain.

I guess he hadn't seen us yet because he had just come in out of

the bright moonlight. The higher up he got, the more of it he shut off from us. All I could see now was a black shape in front of us.

Jeanie tried to turn her head back again to see, but I grabbed it with my hand and held it.

All of a sudden he stopped, with a creak of the whole staircase, and didn't move. I guess he'd seen the white of her blouse up there ahead of him. There was a scratching sound and yellow shone out all over the stairs and he was holding a match out to us!

It wasn't very bright, but it was plenty for him to see us by. And us, him!

I'd been right! It was the man under the awning! But what good did that do now? Those long arms, and saucer eyes, and gee, what a fierce face! Then he started to smile like he was tickled.

He said, "Oh, so a little boy came too, while I was gone."

He came up a step. "And you both got all the way out here and then you couldn't get any farther—hee, hee!"

And he came up another step. "Well, I don't like little boys much, but as long as you came all the way out here, I'll have to make the grave a little bigger!"

I started to tuck my free leg up under me, to stay as far away from him as I could as long as I could. Jeanie was shivering against my side.

"Get out o' here, now!" I said in

a scared voice, very low. "Get out o' here, now! Leave us alone!"

He came up another step and he was bending right over us, double nearly. I couldn't hold out any more, even if I was going on twelve. "Dad!" I started to holler. "*Oh, Dad, quick!*"

"Yes, call your Daddy," he said silkily, reaching out one long arm for Jeanie's blouse. "Call your Daddy. He'll find you all cut up in little pieces."

VIII

I DIDN'T KNOW what I was doing any more. I struck out at him with my free leg.

My foot went right into his stomach and he never expected it. He made a funny sound like "Oof!" and the match went out. The staircase gave a worse bang, even, than when my foot got caught.

He went thumping all the way down to the bottom, and a whole lot of dust came up all around. When I could see the moonlight through it again, there was a big black gap in the middle of the case, but not too wide to jump across, and the rail was off, and the whole thing was tipping sideways from the wall, but not enough to spill you off. And best of all, oh best of all, my foot was free!

He was down there at the foot of the stairs lying back on his elbows. But he didn't seem to be hurt

much. He jumped right up and gave a roar, and reached into his clothes, and when he swung his hand back, something flashed in it in the moonlight.

"Jeanie, quick! My foot's out!" I shouted, and we both went scampering.

We got back in the room where she'd been tied and shut the door with a bang. He had to come up real slow and careful after us this time, so the stairs wouldn't give way altogether, and that gave us time to run all around the place looking for things to block up the door with. There wasn't much—hardly anything at all. Just two empty packing cases and they hardly weighed a thing.

We couldn't get out through the window, because Jeanie couldn't have made it, jumping from that high up.

We got the two packing cases up against the door one on top of the other, and then I got behind them to hold them, and she got behind me. We could hear him testing his way carefully up, growling and cursing us. We could even hear his clothing brush the thin wall between us and him. Finally he gave a horrid laugh, and that showed he was up on the landing already. Then he rushed at the door.

The shove pushed the door and the cases and her and me back a little, but we managed to squeeze it closed again.

"Should I pray?" Jeanie panted.

"Yeah, you better," I puffed, leaning with all my might.

She started to jabber in back of me, "*If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord—*"

He gave another heave, and this time it opened the widest of the lot. I couldn't squeeze it back where it was any more. His shoulder got in and one of his long arms came through, trying to reach at me.

"Pray louder," I wailed at her. "Oh Jeanie, pray louder! I can't hold it—any more!"

Her voice rose to a scream. "*If I should die before I wake—!*"

The fourth heave finished us.

We all went down together, me and her and the cases, and the door swept us back against the wall. That saved us for a minute. He came too far into the middle of the room before he could stop and turn.

I kicked one of the cases toward him, so it would get in his way, and we both scrambled to our feet and ran, she one way, I the other.

He went for her, with the knife out again. I got all the way around the door and out into the hall, but I had to come back again. She'd gone the wrong way, and he'd cornered her over on the other side of the room.

She kept running back and forth in front of the shuttered windows, from one corner to the opposite one, trying to get by him, and he kept dancing in front of her, waving the knife.

I grabbed up a case, tilted it way up over me with both arms, and threw it at him with all my might. It hit him right on the back of the head all right, and he stumbled for a minute. But it was empty, and he stayed right on his feet.

He whirled and said, "I'll get to you in a minute!" and he swung one of those long arms at me with a *whish*—like I was a mosquito.

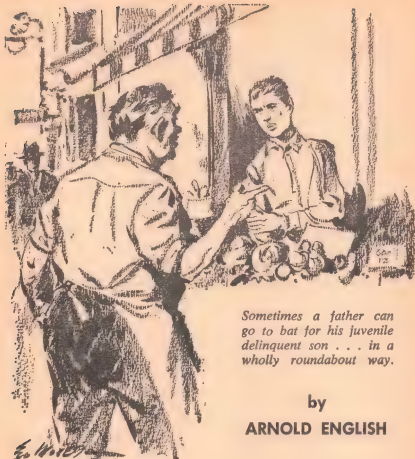
The back of it swiped my head, and something like a comet with a white tail seemed to hit me, and I was way over at the wall, slumping all the way down to the floor. The last thing I saw was him snatching up one of those sacks to throw it over Jeanie's head like a net.

The comet kept getting brighter and brighter, and it switched over by the open doorway instead of my head, and split up into two or three comets, and some men came crashing in behind pocket flashlights, like the one my father carries.

One of them even seemed to be him, but I knew better than to believe that. I knew I was just dizzy. I closed my eyes and sort of went to sleep for a few minutes, wishing I'd been able to save Jeanie.

When I opened my eyes I seemed to be floating around half-way between the floor and ceiling, and when I looked around, so was Jeanie. We were both sort of swinging around up in the air. I thought maybe we died and turned

(Concluded on page 141)



Sometimes a father can go to bat for his juvenile delinquent son . . . in a wholly roundabout way.

by
ARNOLD ENGLISH

See No Evil

JOSEPH WELDON was carefully, methodically, laying out carrots in the wooden display box at the northwest corner of his fruit and vegetable store, a thoughtful frown on his face. He looked up

when he heard familiar footsteps coming in, and a wary smile drifted onto his big, gray face.

"It's surprising you got back so soon, Vince," he said.

"I took a walk, dad." Instead of

his usual swagger, Vince came briskly from the diamond-shaped marble floor in front of the store to the wooden boards in back of the selling area. He reached up a hand to cover part of his shirt above the elbow.

Weldon sighed, and wished his wife were still alive to take care of this kid who gave so much trouble. Weldon had heard that his swaggering, callous and brutal son had become a close friend of Zack Raymond, a twenty-year-old hood who had pulled three robberies to date, and that Vince was going to join in the fourth and biggest heist. And that it was going to be pulled this very afternoon. He just had to keep his son around the store all day.

His mind preoccupied with his problem, he hurried into the back room for the carrot display sign, accidentally brushing Vince's arm. The boy jerked his arm back quickly, and redness could be seen on his shirt.

"It's just paint, dad," Vince said hastily. "I brushed against a building they were starting to paint a few blocks from here."

A customer walked in. Weldon kept himself from saying anything. After he had waited on her, the door opened again and Tom Purdy came into the store. Purdy was a humorless detective with cold blue eyes that seemed to gaze into a bleak future.

"Know anything about a rob-

bery four blocks down?" Purdy asked Weldon calmly.

"I'm not a detective," Weldon said, shrugging in angry protest.

"Uh-huh. Well, Karl Meinhard's ice cream parlor was held up by somebody who wore a mask. The robber got one hundred and fourteen bucks in cash, along with a lot of blood on himself."

"How did that happen?" Weldon asked.

"He shot the owner, Meinhard, when the old man lunged toward him. Say, anything wrong, Joe? You look a little sick."

"No, nothing at all." But Weldon had stopped shaving brown butts from the lettuce leaves, and a tiny nerve at the angle of his jaw had started to twitch.

"I'm going to all the storekeepers in this neighborhood to ask if they know anything," Purdy said, "or if they've had any recent hold-up troubles that can give me a clue."

Automatically Weldon said, "Not me."

"You don't have to yell," Purdy told him. "As for Meinhard, in case you're curious, he's hurt pretty bad. But he'll survive it. It's a shame he can't identify the hoodlum who shot him."

Weldon was in the back of the store as soon as Tom Purdy got to the street again a minute later. A plan was forming in his mind. He snapped at Vince: "Take off your shirt and give it to me."

"What's the big idea?"

"You fool, do you want to keep a shirt with blood all over it?"

"This isn't blood," Vince said angrily. "I told you what happened. They're painting a building on Chisholm Avenue, and I stumbled against it while I was walking."

"And of course you can prove that," Weldon said. "You're such a good friend of that hoodlum, Zack Raymond, and the neighborhood gossip that you and Raymond are going to commit a robbery together is so well known that the police are sure to let you off the hook this time."

"What me and Zack Raymond do is our business," Vince snapped, "and I didn't rob old man Meinhard. I never went near him, dad—so help me."

"Give me that shirt or I'll rip it off you," Weldon said through his teeth. "I won't have my son convicted of killing somebody."

Reluctantly, Vince took the shirt off, but he couldn't resist rolling it into a ball and throwing it to the farthest and dimmest corner. Weldon left the store long enough to buy a new gray shirt for his son. He didn't even bother to have it wrapped. The first thing he did when he came back again was to walk out of his way to pick up the old shirt.

Weldon destroyed the old shirt methodically, tearing it into strips and then setting fire to each strip

and flushing what was left down the toilet. Vince, who waited on trade for two dollars an hour and hardly ever earned it, had to serve a few customers while Weldon was busy erasing all evidence of his son's shirt.

Weldon was as rigid as a stretched-out rubber band when he got through. Sweat had broken out on his forehead, and his cheek muscles moved tautly at every step he could bring himself to take. Now let them come!

The front door opened again and he found himself looking out at a patch of street and the sight of Tom Purdy, the detective, coming back. This time Purdy looked more grim than ever, and he gestured Weldon and his son into the back room. Vince seemed uncomfortable and curious.

Purdy said, "I'll put my cards on the table. I can prove that your father bought a new shirt several minutes ago, Vince. I can prove that you wore a blue shirt earlier today, and that there was a red smear on it when you walked into this store. You were seen. And any pal of Zack Raymond's wouldn't hesitate to commit a robbery. Come to think of it, I hear you and Raymond are running around together now."

"There was paint on that shirt!" Vince's voice rose in protest. "It wasn't blood—"

"Prove it," Purdy said.

"I can't, because—" Vince

turned to his father. "You must have been able to smell paint on that shirt. You tore it up on purpose, hoping I'd be arrested. You always say you're loyal, but you framed me."

"You won't be convicted without evidence," Weldon said. He couldn't truthfully deny his son's statements.

"You've sent your own son to prison!" Vince sneered, and spat at his father. Weldon wiped spittle off his face as Vince was taken away.

Weldon received a phone call from Purdy some two hours later. "We're going to have to let Vince go because, like you said, there's

no real evidence," Purdy told him. "By the way, Zack Raymond won't bother your son again, ever, Joe. He tried a bank robbery on his own instead of using the partner he'd planned on. Before he died from a guard's bullet he admitted the Meinhard job, too."

"I see," Weldon said. "I see."

"No matter how you look at it, Joe, it's lucky your son was in jail when Raymond tried to pull the bank robbery this afternoon." Tom Purdy hesitated. "You're nobody's fool, Weldon, and I'm starting to wonder if you didn't purposely trick me into pulling your son in. But, hell, I don't suppose you'd do a thing like that."

IF I SHOULD DIE BEFORE I WAKE by Cornell Woolrich

(Concluded from page 137)

into angels, but it was just a man holding her in his arms, and another one holding me.

"Now easy on those stairs," one of the men said.

Neither one of them was my father though. But I saw him across the room swinging his arm up and down, with something that looked like a blackjack in it, and two of the other men were trying to grab his arm and hold it.

I heard him saying, "Too bad I didn't get out here a little ahead of the rest of you. Well, I may have to bring him in alive, now that

there are witnesses. I'm damned if I'll bring him in conscious."

They took Jeanie and me to the doctor to be looked over as soon as we got back. He said we would both be all right, only we'd have bad dreams for a while maybe. I wondered how he knew ahead of time like that what kind of dreams we were going to have.

When we got home I asked my father, "Did I do all right?"

He took out his badge and stuck it on my pajamas.

"You make me look like a piker!" was all he said.



THE SCAR

by
**MICHAEL
AVALLONE**

*A too personal question can make a man want
to kill . . . and produce an odd reaction.*

SOME PEOPLE have a very odd quirk. The obvious things jump out and hit them right smack in the face, and they have to say or do something about it. They've never grasped how golden silence can be.

Me, I'm different. I can take practically anything in stride, which is pretty good for a guy who doesn't look past tomorrow. But I don't know. I guess I never would have learned the truth about the Boss' scar if our delivery guy hadn't been such a mug. The only reason I mention it is because I thought you might like to know

how the Boss got that scar in the first place. You've seen it, of course, and I'm sure you'll agree that it's a pretty bad scar. I never, in fact, saw such a mark on a guy in all my life, and that's something, considering I was in the Medics in Korea.

Anyway, this is what happened. I was doing a carbon and valve job on Old Man Henry's '58 Ford down at the place when this punk Don Philips drives up in his station wagon.

The Boss doesn't exactly like him but he has to do business with

the guy because we're so far from town. We have to keep a lot of spare parts around the place, and business along the highway is too good for me to be hopping into town three or four times a day. So Philips works for us now and then, whenever we phone him to hurry over with whatever it is we've run short of.

The Boss comes out from the shack we use for an office to see Philips and sign for the parts. Me, I'm busy cleaning Old Man Henry's motor but I got my good eye peeled on them both.

My Boss is a regular guy. He pays me well, doesn't butt into my private life and gives me lots of smokes when I'm out of them. So anybody that gives him a raw deal gives me one.

Don Philips is the kind of guy who must give everyone a hard time. You know what I mean—big, fresh and stupid. That's a pretty awful combination in any guy, and there are times when it can be very depressing.

Philips slams his car door louder than he has to and runs up to the Boss yelling at the top of his lungs. "Here I am, boys. On time as usual. How's the gasoline business?"

The Boss doesn't say anything, just takes out his wallet to pay the dope off. It's a pretty hot day and we've serviced maybe a dozen cars in less than an hour. We're both dirty and tired and Philips is

practically a white collar worker compared to us.

Suddenly, he claps his hand on the Boss' shoulder and puts his beefy, red, pock-marked face right out in front.

"Say, I always meant to ask you. Where did you get that hash mark? The damn thing must be almost a foot long. Some greaser knife you?"

He didn't mean anything by it really. Like I said, he's just one of those guys who has to make conversation. But you can imagine how it hit the Boss.

Anyway, I don't have to imagine how he hit Philips. I saw the punch coming, and I saw it land. I think it would have dropped Liston. It was roundhouse right and it puts the sap flat on his back in the dust of the road.

The Boss' face drains color like a tea bag and he says, "You son of a—" I never heard him cuss like that before.

The Boss stands over him, his big hands looking like two heads of lettuce and I can see he's got murder in his head. I run over with a tire iron expecting some trouble, but he shoves me away like I was a baby.

Philips picks himself up, his face redder than usual. He looks just like the guy who found out he was backing his car over a stick of dynamite.

In between wiping the blood from his smashed mouth, he says,

"What did I say? All I asked you was—"

"Mention it again and I'll kill you," the Boss shouts, clenching and unclenching his hands. "Get out of here!"

He goes for Philips again, but I get between them just in time. Philips runs like a big bird and nearly breaks a leg climbing behind the wheel of his jalopy. He's plenty scared. I'm not working for any pygmy.

The Boss cusses once more and slams into the shack.

Philips is backing out onto the highway when I lean over his running board.

"You're lucky to be alive, stupid. I'm surprised he didn't kill you."

"I was just trying to be friendly, Harry. That's all."

I was sick of him myself by then. "Beat it and don't show up around here anymore."

"But—"

"You heard what I said."

"Okay! Okay!"

The station wagon disappears down the road and I go back into the office.

We don't have a big joint, so the Boss is sitting at the only desk with his face in his hands. Seeing a guy cry does things to me. I can't stand it. I put the tire iron down heavy on the desk and he looks up.

It's as if I was seeing the scar for the first time. It's one of those

raw, fleshy-looking things that start at the corner of one eye and end off down around the mouth. It always gave the Boss a very serious expression on his face. Beyond that I never figured.

There are tears in his eyes. I make like I don't see them.

"Harry—" he begins.

I put my hand on his shoulder. After all, I don't want to get mixed up in anything. "Look, Boss. You don't have to tell me a damn thing. Remember that I just work for you."

He puts a big, greasy handkerchief to his eyes and shakes his head. "Harry, you're a regular guy. All the time you been working here you never asked me once about this thing."

"I never liked that punk Philips anyway."

"But you never asked me!"

"So what? You did a good thing. What a punch! Ever been a boxer, Boss?"

"You never asked me once," he says again.

He doesn't want to get off the trolley, so I throw away my transfer and sit down. I don't know what to think. I gave him an out but he didn't take it.

The Boss folds his hands together and begins. His voice comes out low, then picks up like a gunned motor.

"Harry, a long time ago, when I was in reform school . . ."

(Continued from other side)

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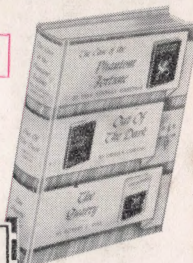
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